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ISSUE 79 MARCH 2013

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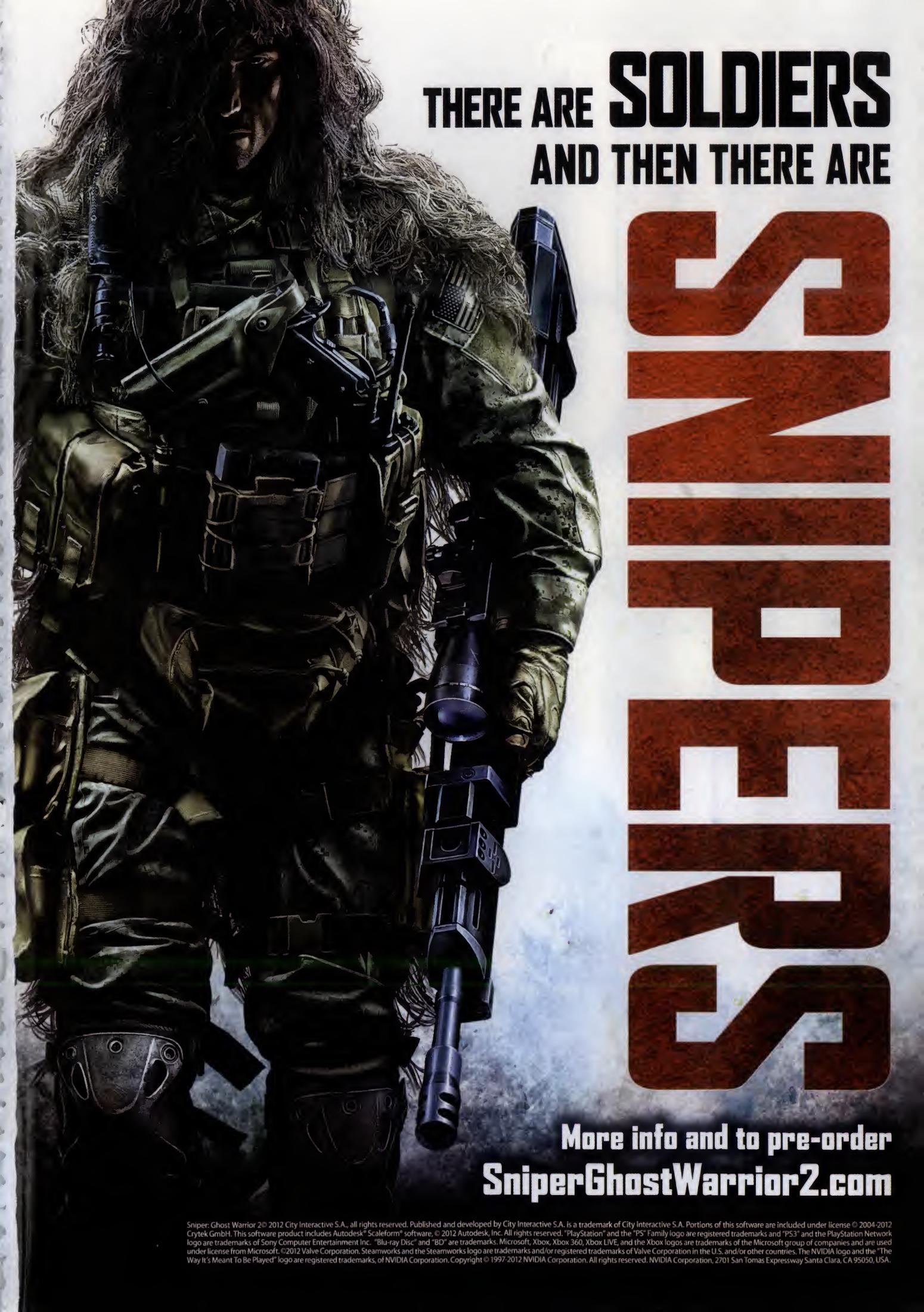
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BIOSHOCK INFINITE

We get skyhooked by this best-in-series sequel

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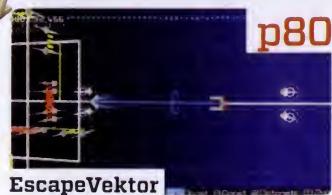
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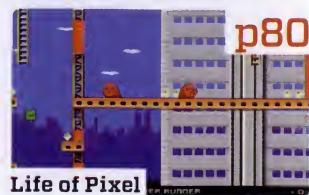
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Life of Pixel



IN YOUR FACE

Far Cry 3

Was *Far Cry 3*'s story any good? Tobe and Paul fight it out for your pleasure. **p26**



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A History of Violence

Videogames don't cause violence, but maybe they can help prevent it? **p24**



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FUNERAL FOR A FRIEND

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Meet the team

**Paul Taylor****Deputy Editor**

PlayStation Mobile games have been taking up my time, but I'm hungry for the PS3 bigguns.

Playing: *Surge***Wanting:** *The Last of Us***Stephanie Goh****Art Director**

Playing *Sleeping Dogs* while eating pork buns. "Why don't you have a pork bun in your hand?"

Playing: *Sleeping Dogs***Wanting:** *BioShock Infinite***Dan Staines****Contributor**

If you haven't already bought the Leviathan DLC for *Mass Effect 3* you're missing out. It's near essential.

Playing: *Mass Effect 3***Wanting:** *BioShock Infinite***James Cottie****Contributor**

So, THQ's assets are being auctioned off. I hope *Saints Row* finds a good home...

Playing: *Retro City Rampage***Wanting:** *Dragon's Crown***James Ellis****Contributor**

Unfortunately I've recently discovered Twitter and my productivity has bombed like a whoopie cushion at a funeral.

Playing: *Split/Second***Wanting:** *Crysis 3***Nathan Lawrence****Contributor**

The greatest threat facing gamers today is rediscovering the addictiveness of *Skyrim*.

Playing: *Skyrim***Wanting:** *BioShock Infinite***Dave Kozicki****Contributor**

Is it wrong that I really, REALLY want *Far Cry 4* to have Vaas and Christopher Mintz-Plasse as co-op buds?

Playing: *DmC***Wanting:** *Remember Me***Toby McCasker****Contributor**

Did you see that *Cyberpunk 2077* trailer thing? Laawd. How I have waited for this day. Please come again.

Playing: *Ni No Kuni***Wanting:** *Cyberpunk 2077***Angry Sackboy****Contributor**

Are we absolutely sure this island in *Far Cry 3* isn't New Zealand? Everyone on it has a kiwi accent.

Playing: *Far Cry 3***Wanting:** *GTA V*

Editorial



Well, we did it, comrade. We earned ourselves that R18+ for videogames. The first of many ultra-violent, adults-only titles are rolling towards Aussie stores as we speak. And thank God, too, because I was getting sick of reading about it.

Before we do let that great crusade pass into lexicon, only to resurface as a war story you'll tell your grand kids ("oh, it was horrible Billy, there were religious nuts and dickhead politicians everywhere"), let me register one final complaint.

Why the hell should the honour of the first R18+ rated game in Australia (*Ninja Gaiden 3: Razor's Edge*) go to a Nintendo system instead of us, or even our allies-of-convenience over on Xbox? It's like we both fought our arses off to take Nazi held Berlin only to have Switzerland parachute in out of nowhere and tackle Hitler.

I'm no rabid fanboy when it comes to the big three consoles (though I have a very clear and obvious favourite), but it seems to me that the PlayStation brand has done much, much more to promote good old fashioned, reach-for-the-bucket violence than whatever Nintendo's last two rainbow-pooping consoles ever did.

Did the Mario crowd bleed, as we did, when the conservatives fired the first shots and got *GTA San Andreas* recalled? No. Where were they when we blew the gaming horn of Gondor to rally against the banning of *Mortal Kombat*? Nowhere.

I'm not really that upset, of course. Truth be told I'm excited by the fact that we finally have all three console manufacturers together on the same page for once; united by adult games and poised to become allies for gaming's next great cause.

A XXX rating for videogames.

Who the hell is with me? What say you, my horny brethren?! It's going to take us at least another 10 years to get it through parliament. We may as well get that katamari rolling now...

Adam.

Adam Mathew**Editor****Playing:** *Dead Space 3* (again)**Wanting:** *GTA V***SPEAK WITH US!**

Love the mag? Hate the mag? We want your opinions and questions on OPS, on games – on anything that you feel the need to share with your fellow readers. The best letter of each issue wins a prize! Write to us on paper or on a computer at:

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Question: what is the gift that keeps on giving the whole year round? Love? Wrong. A scratch-and-win calendar of celebrity crotches? No. Please stop abusing our rhetorical system.

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PlayStation
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VIOLENCE AND

Debate re-ignites after tragic school shooting

US President Barack Obama has proposed a \$10 million study to address the relationship between videogames, media images and gun violence in response to the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting. Videogames became part of the tragedy after early reports claimed shooter Adam Lanza was addicted to violent videogames, prompting a discussion that involved leading game developers and US Vice President Joe Biden.

Ironically the most outspoken critics of gaming as a determinant for the massacre have been the National Rifle Association (NRA), who then released their own first-person shooter on a mobile platform. Executive Vice President Wayne La Pierre described titles such as *Grand Theft Auto* and *Mortal Kombat* as the 'filthiest form of pornography'.

"There exists in this country a callous, corrupt and corrupting shadow industry that sells, and sows, violence against its own people," he said.

Comedian Stephen Colbert capitalised on Pierre's controversial speech, joking the cause of the violence "Has to be that America is the only country in the world that has videogames, we're the only country that has violent movies, and we're the only country with crazy people."

The nation maintains the highest gun ownership rate in the world at 89 guns for every 100 people with approximately 60 per cent of homicides caused by a firearm. Australia in comparison has 15 firearms for every 100 people and sees 11.5 per cent of its homicide deaths the result of guns.

Other institutions have been quick to point the finger at the videogame industry. A community

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VIDEOGAMES

organisation based in Connecticut in the United States recently withdrew a trade program where people could swap their violent games for gift certificates. Its aim was to "Promote discussion of violent videogames and media with children and with the families at the home," said spokesman Dick Fortunato in an interview with gaming website Polygon.

We spoke to ex-2K producer Bryan Ma about why violence is so prevalent in the medium. "Violence is easy to simulate and attach goals to," he said. "Physical conflict is an easy conflict for narrative... looking for non-violent games generally means you'll be looking at stuff that is trying harder to explore uncharted territory."

Some game studios have explored

such territory successfully. Quantic Dream founder David Cage, responsible for the PlayStation hit *Heavy Rain*, adamantly maintains his games won't glorify violence. "Whatever is possible with interactive entertainment should be explored, and I don't think we're seeing that right now. The industry is too far balanced towards kids and strangers. It's too focused on violence," he said.

Meanwhile Thatgamecompany, makers of the PlayStation exclusive titles *Journey* and *Flower*, focus on giving gamers an emotional experience without the violence. Indeed the company's mission statement reads "Create timeless entertainment that makes positive changes to the human psyche worldwide." Sounds good to us.

Martin Gladstone



▶ According to an analyst at Baird Equity Research **PlayStation 4 will be released in October this year and will cost approximately \$400**. This same analyst also warns that there may be "early production issues" with the PS4 but is unwilling (or unable) to specify what they might be. Our guess? He's making shit up.

▶ **THQ is no more.** At time of going to print the publisher has sold most of its internal studios and projects to other videogame developers and publishers (all figures are in US\$). Relic, the makers of the Warhammer 40,000 strategy games, goes to SEGA for \$26.6 mil. Koch Media (who owns Deep Silver, maker of *Dead Island*) has bought Volition for \$22.3 mil, and the Metro franchise for \$5.8 mil. Take 2 will buy Turtle Rock's title *Evolve* for \$10.8 mil. Ubisoft now has another studio in Canada, buying THQ Montreal for \$2.5 mil, and *South Park: The Stick of Truth* for just over \$3.2 million. Crytek has snapped up the *Homefront* franchise for \$500,000. weirdly, sadly, no-one put a bid in for Vigil, makers of *Darksiders*.

▶ **Sony has sold an estimated 77 million PlayStation 3s worldwide**, besting Microsoft's Xbox 360 by more than a million units.

▶ **Metal Gear** maestro Hideo Kojima did not want Raiden to star in *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance*, and had instead intended to make Gray Fox (aka Frank Jaeger) the game's protagonist. "It was my staff in Kojima Productions that insisted on Raiden, and I respected their idea," said the designer in a recent interview with gaming website IGN.

▶ **Oddworld developer Just Add Water wants your help deciding which game to make next.** A poll posted on the developer's site asks "Which game would you like to see after [we finish Abe's *Oddysee* remake] *New 'n' Tasty?*" and goes on to list a number of intriguing possibilities, including *Stranger's Wrath II*, *Munch's Exodus*, and *Abe's Exodus HD* – the latter being the current front-runner with 26 per cent of the vote.

▶ **Epic Mickey 2** has not been an epic sales success, shifting a measly 270,000 units across all platforms in its first month on sale in America. For comparison's sake, the first *Epic Mickey* – a Wii exclusive – sold in excess of 1.3 million units during the same time frame.

▶ **It seems that a television show based on Fallout may be in the works.** Why else would Bethesda Softworks register a trademark for "an on-going television program set in a post-nuclear world"? Unless, of course, they're planning to make a TV show about *Rage...*

▶ In a heart-warming display of developer solidarity, **Devil May Cry** director Hideki Kamiya has expressed support for the recent reboot. "DmC is a very unique title, and I honestly hope that people enjoy it," he tweeted recently – to which *DmC* developer Ninja Theory replied "Thank you for your kind words. We are of course huge fans of your work and can't wait to play *Metal Gear Rising*." Awwww! How nice!

► INTERVIEW



Small games, big ideas

A team of three make up a London-based studio that, since 2010, has made 14 games for various platforms. They've also started developing for PS Vita. Creative Director **Richard Hill-Whittal** tells us more about Super Icon.

Tell us about yourself and your team: who are you and what type of games do you make?

RHW: We are a new studio based in London, UK, developing and self-publishing our own titles. We're working across a few genres at the moment, which has been great fun. Our current/recent games include a 2D platformer (*Life of Pixel*) and a 2D SHMUP (*MegaBlast*) for PSM and until recently two Vita native 3D games (a pub/bar games collection and a race game with track creation/sharing).

Why did you pick PlayStation Mobile as a platform to make games for?

RHW: We were chatting to Sony Europe about Vita stuff, and they asked if we'd like to join the PSM Beta. It seemed a logical progression after PSP Minis, and Sony were very supportive and keen to work with developers on their new platform.

What's the biggest surprise in making a PlayStation game that works across multiple platforms?

“It seemed a logical progression, and Sony were very supportive”

RHW: Certainly the biggest surprise for me was how smoothly the PSM titles run on all the platforms. You don't even need to worry about separate controls as the touch screen devices have built in virtual Playstation buttons. It really couldn't be better in that respect.

Minis were originally designed to invigorate the PSP market but now they're made to work on PSP, Vita and PS3. Is that a benefit or drawback?

RHW: Definitely a benefit. We had a few issues with PS3 compatibility, due to problems with the PSP emulation, but it opened up the market a lot so that was great for us.

What about for the guys who want to make PlayStation games – is PlayStation Mobile a good first step?

RHW: Playstation Mobile is a great first step. My advice would be to start simple, use the Sony examples (we used the Sony 2D library for both of our titles). If you are doing a tile based game get support for a good tile editor in there at the early stages (we used the "Tiled" map editor). Also make sure you download the royalty free sound effects Sony have supplied as part of the PSM developer program. Very useful indeed, and a nice touch from Sony.



What's your next game going to be, and why will it be the best PS Mobile - or minis - title yet?

RHW: Well it has been a strange few months – we had two PlayStation Vita native titles in development, but don't have the resources currently to continue. We would like to do another PSM title, currently we're mulling over a few concepts. Also we plan to revisit *Life of Pixel* with a 16-bit themed sequel. We're also working on our first update for *Life of Pixel* which should be ready in a couple of weeks or so. 

OPS VAULT MARCH

2004 ▶

Good lord that's an awful cover. Sorry about that. Once you get past the angry looking men and the strange lady lurking near the spine, it's all action inside. We checked out the ill-fated *Starcraft: Ghost* back when it was still all systems go and found it was hot on the heels of stealth gurus Solid Snake and Sam Fisher. Cover titles *SOCOM II* (8 out of 10) and *Rainbow Six 3* (a respectable 7) were all shades of brown. Action brown, though.



2006 ▶

Starcraft: Ghost was still on our horizons in our massive 'Best Games of 2006' feature, and we were still enthusiastic about it saying it "looked great when we played it three years ago." It was going to be a busy year, with more than 50 games to be released on PS2, 11 on PSP and 10 on PS3. Meanwhile, the chins and fans-tacular *Black* scored a 9 ("light on story and heavy on action, delivering wave after wave of shuddering wargasm").



2012 ▶

This was the PS Vita's debut, and it certainly left its mark with a stack of great games. *Uncharted: Golden Abyss* proved that you could have a big screen game on the go. Elsewhere, it was a muted issue for reviews, with *Final Fantasy XIII-2*, the great but financially ruptured *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning*, *The Darkness II* and more. Disappointingly, *Starcraft: Ghost* did not feature at all.



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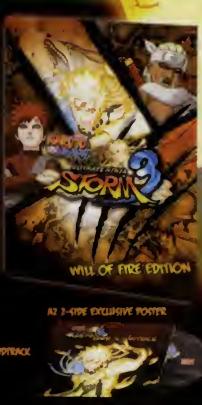


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▶ IN YOUR FACE

Was Far Cry 3's story actually any good?

Amongst the trips, traps, animals and firearms, we figure out if Ubisoft's open-world shooter had a solid narrative.



Toby McCasker

YES

Toby reads a lot of books but has trouble focusing, so please put his books in his games okay.

same way as Casey Hudson's sudden surrealist about-turn finale for *Mass Effect 3* – on 99% of everyone because: this is a shooter. *Far Cry 3*'s genre is not rocket science, but its narrative thrust is. Therein lies the disconnect that has sown Yohalem's ambition from its revelation. I know exactly what he wanted to say and how he wanted every gamer to feel while they played. In this he didn't succeed, but in a much more important way he did: gaming needs this. Gaming is a billion dollar industry and has been for some time, but for all those self-congratulatory statistics claiming the age of the average gamer is 30+ and counting, it still has yet to match its cerebellum to its body. The rise of multiplayer and the fall of single player has devalued the fiction of games in the eyes of many developers, but every time an effort like Yohalem's is blindly maligned rather than absorbed with considered thought, we move closer to an always-on dystopia of "ur ghey." No thanks.

Want to hear more of the OPS team disagreeing with each other? Check out our Podcast available on side B of our cover disc. Want to get into a great debate with one of us, or a fellow reader? Hop onto www.facebook.com/OPSAustralia and make your case. The best topics may find their way into the magazine.

Paul and I both interviewed *Far Cry 3*'s lead writer Jeffrey Yohalem last year, but from very different perspectives: Paul as a bumbling gamer-oaf, myself as a sometimes-author (I have a book out soon, please buy it). During the course of my time with the guy, we spoke little of *Far Cry 3* itself and much more about the art of fiction. Jeffrey should be writing books, not game narratives. He's an impassioned and intuitive quill struggling with relaying the nuance inside his head within the confines of a platform the demanding and broad accessibility of which can't often allow for the power of a novel's suggestion. His story is brilliant, make no mistake. The subtleties that make it what should be are there, but will be lost – or worse, as they have often been, completely misinterpreted in much the

Toby and I both interviewed Jeffrey Yohalem, *Far Cry 3*'s lead writer, well before the release date of the stellar shooter-cum-action-adventure game (it's really good, you should buy it). Toby interviewed Yohalem as a twitchy, wild-eyed loner looking to leverage his status in the media as a means to his own end, and I as a servant to you, the reader. I'll tell you now, Jeffrey Yohalem knows what he wants from a story, and knows what he wants it to do. But it doesn't work in this game. He said to me at the time that "the story in other games is not about holding a gun. Our game is about that, and we're exploring every side of that. We're dealing with it metaphorically, psychologically." He also said that "the gun will transform who [playable character Jason Brody] is. And, it will transform who the player is." Yes, the gun succeeded in transforming Jason from nervous white boy to adopted warrior, but so did the tattoos, drugs, and skinning animals to make a bigger wallet. I don't think it transformed the player, not least because the story makes a few huge turns roughly halfway in just before Jason lands on the second island, and then again roughly three-quarters of the way in. In an interview with *Penny Arcade*, Yohalem says that we're seeing the story through Jason's eyes, and his parts of his point of view can be considered fantasy. It's a shame Yohalem needed to explain that. Like Toby said, the nuances are lost somewhat, and for me – and a lot of people – it's the broad strokes, the stuff you do when you're not playing a dedicated story missions that makes the best tales.



Paul Taylor

NO

Paul's onto his third playthrough of *Far Cry 3*, content to toy with pirates by swooping off towers with a wingsuit.

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Thanks to QV Software we have 10 prize packs to give away, comprised of a *Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2* T-shirt, poster, as well as a copy of the game. This is an exclusive prize pack that you simply cannot buy!

As well as a challenging single player campaign where you'll have to factor in distance, wind resistance, and bullet drop when planning your shot, *Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2* also features a multiplayer mode, all factored around the authentic sniping experience. Technologically advanced, this is a game to set your sights on.

To win one of these awesome packs, simply answer the following question and follow the entry instructions:

A sniper's tool of the trade is a:

- A: spoon
- B: sandwich
- C: sniper rifle

Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2 will be available in stores March 15.

Entry Instructions

To enter this *Official PlayStation Magazine – Australia* competition email your entries to **ops@citrusmedia.com.au** with 'Sniper 2 comp' ONLY in the subject line. Email entries are entitled to one entry (multiple entries will be deleted). Alternatively, send clearly marked postal entries to OPS competitions **PO Box 20154, World Square, NSW, 2002**. Please include your name, age and address with your answer. Chance plays no part in determining winners. **Competitions close 26/03/2013**. Winners will be notified by mail.



Around the World

OPS trawls high and low for what's going on around the globe in tech and gaming



THAT WINNING SMELL

CALIFORNIA, USA

Ever wondered what a Bugatti Veyron smells like in *Need for Speed: Most Wanted* after a burnout? How about the stench of Kratos' sweat-soaked man dress? Sensory Acumen's GameSkunk could be delivering such delightful scents to your gaming console in the not too distant future. The technology may also be used in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder, providing support in the battle against unpleasant memories. GameSkunk can supposedly recreate over 30,000 different smells, most being *entirely* child-friendly. (Or not.)



4K IS A-OK

LAS VEGAS, USA

Ultra High definition gaming is (nearly) upon us as 4K televisions dominated the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) earlier this year. Displaying four times the resolution of a Full HD TV these beasts also boast prices rocketing into five figures. One such offering from Samsung, an 85" behemoth, comes with a \$40,000 price tag. Only 77 units were available to preorder with the company also showing off 95" and 110" models on the CES show floor. Don't go rushing out to get one yet though, aside from tech demos there's not much content at all.'



HUDS UP

CONNECTICUT, USA

Audio and infotainment equipment company Harman has created an augmented reality display for your car's windshield. Working like Google's glass technology, the HUD is touch free, instead controlled by user voice and gestures. The display contains email, Facebook and real-time weather data, but will be most useful for augmented navigation, recreating GPS systems popularised by games such as *GTA* and *Sleeping Dogs*. Who said life couldn't mimic games? Now all we need is a portal gun, a *Mass Effect* singularity device and Isaac Clarke's ripper.



HELPING YOU PILL OUT

CAMBRIDGE, ENGLAND

Data pills were recently used in a trial by 50 firefighters in Victoria, and were designed to monitor the body's response to heat stress. Because heat stress causes unconsciousness and cardiac arrest the pills transmit vital information including skin temperature, heart and respiration rate. If any of these reach dangerous levels the firefighter is prompted to take a 'cool down' break which could be indispensable in their war against fire. Can't think of anyone who deserves such a thing more - except maybe Dovahkiin. And that bloke from The Fantastic Four.



PORTABLE POWER

HAMPSHIRE, ENGLAND

Pack your PS Vita bag with a Powermonkey charger when holidaying, because if you ever get stuck on a deserted island this contraption can keep your portable baby from running out of juice. Using solar power technology the Powermonkey takes 15 hours to fully recharge in optimal sunlight. If it just so happens it gets snatched by a passing shark you may be in luck - it's also waterproof for 30 mins up to a depth of 1 metre. Though we'd imagine you'd have a hard time catching said shark, unless you bring out those improbable *Far Cry* skills.

INTERNATIONAL TOP 5 CHARTS

EUROPE



- 1 **Call of Duty: Black Ops II** Activision
- 2 **FIFA 13** Electronic Arts
- 3 **Far Cry 3** Ubisoft
- 4 **Need for Speed: Most Wanted** Electronic Arts
- 5 **Assassins Creed III** Ubisoft

JAPAN



- 1 **One Piece: Romance Dawn, Bouken no Yoake** Namco Bandai Games
- 2 **Fist of the North Star: Ken's Rage 2** Tecmo Koei
- 3 **Yakuza 5** SEGA
- 4 **Hot Shots Golf: World Invitational** Sony Computer Entertainment
- 5 **Call of Duty: Black Ops II** Square Enix

USA



- 1 **Call of Duty: Black Ops II** Activision
- 2 **Assassin's Creed III** Ubisoft
- 3 **NBA 2K13** Take-Two Interactive
- 4 **Madden NFL 13** Electronic Arts
- 5 **Far Cry 3** Ubisoft

► INFOCUS

Splinter Cell Blacklist

First the bad news: Ubisoft announced recently that *Splinter Cell Blacklist* – which was to come out in just a few months time – has now been delayed until August 23. Nuts.

The good news is it looks suh-weet. There was concern among *SC* devotees that *Blacklist* would emphasise action over stealth à la *Conviction*. However, looking at the most recent trailer it's clear that this is not the case. While it's true gung-ho players can drop the ninja schtick and go in all guns blazing, traditionalists are free to keep it on the downlow, and will be rewarded appropriately for doing so.

So: best of both worlds? Certainly seems so. A pity we have to wait 'til August to find out for sure...



In their WORDS

Industry chatter, inside tips and loose lips



"Why go first, when your competitors can look at your specifications and come up with something better?"

Kazuo "Kaz" Hirai, Sony CEO, on letting Microsoft release details about their next-gen console first.



"We are in the peak of [violence in entertainment]. Video game violence? Unprecedented. I'm not saying he [President Obama] wants to censor this, I think he should sensitize people that they should protect their children, family by family, from these kinds of electronic child molesters."

Ralph Nader, former US presidential candidate, gently infers video games to pedophilia.



"I let [Bethesda] know that fans were clamouring, trying to figure out if there's any chance that Three Dog would be back sometime. And, you know, they let it slip that it looks like Three Dog will. And they said that maybe you could tell your fans. I don't think they even anticipated it would explode like this."

Erik Todd Dellums, *Fallout 3* voice actor, on the possibility of *Fallout 4*.



► INTERVIEW

COMING OUT OF THE WALLS

Gearbox Software's *Aliens: Colonial Marines* has been in development for a long time, and it's based on a movie that's more than a quarter of a century old. **Brian Burleson**, Senior Producer, tells us why it's going to blow you away.

OPS: It's been roughly 26 years since *Aliens* was released. What's the appeal for wanting to make a game based on that movie? What do you want to achieve by making *Colonial Marines*?

BB: What isn't appealing? Having the opportunity to work in a universe that has affected so many people and so many genres of entertainment is truly exciting. It also helps that *Aliens* had some of the best characters, creatures and weapons you could hope for when creating a first person shooter. Pulse Rifles, Smartguns, Xenomorph soldiers, facehuggers, and one massive Queen.

OPS: Both *Borderlands* and *Borderlands 2* have been released in the time that *A:CM* was first announced. What's been the hold-up?

BB: The game was announced way before full production began on the project. Typically you don't do that, but a lot of people got excited and couldn't help themselves. Full production on the project started late 2010. Prior to that there was a lot of pre-production and prototyping with a smaller team while *Borderlands* was in full production.

OPS: Let's face it: fans can be insanely possessive when it comes to games that

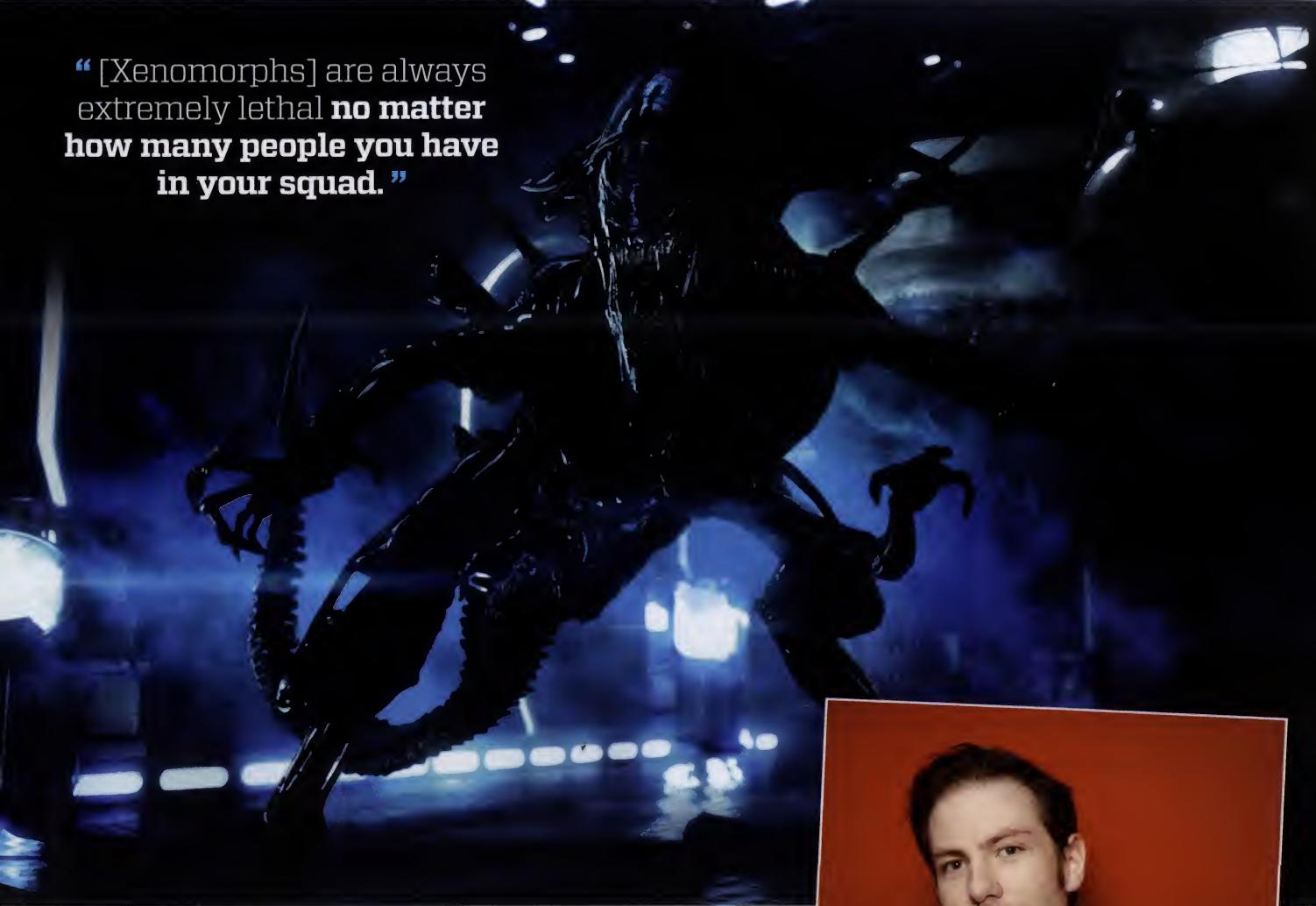
use iconic film licences. How do you negate a backlash like this? Do you care, or is it worth caring about?

BB: Fans certainly can be, but it's not something to fight against. At the end of the day you see that it stems from the fact that they care. What you do is listen. A lot of community fans actually helped nudge us in better directions and in some cases directly contributed to making sure *A:CM* is as canonical as possible. One of the guys who we met online, Sean Maio, recreated a Smartgun from authentic source parts. A freakin Smartgun! That's dedication. So, we had been struggling for a while to animate the movement of the Smartgun and when we saw Sean with his Smartgun, I arranged for him to fly out to Dallas and we mo'capped him! When you play the game and see someone running around with a Smartgun, that's Sean.

OPS: We saw a new alien species leap out at us at the end of level 4. How do you explain the existence of a new species when fans know there's only a couple of types of aliens from the movie?

BB: That actually isn't a new species of Alien you were teased by. I don't want to spoil anything, but that Xeno is actually one you see very briefly in *Aliens*. If you are a hardcore fan you'll know what I'm talking about. That next mission is pretty awesome because it dives into what happened to the Xenos at Hadley's Hope after

“[Xenomorphs] are always extremely lethal **no matter how many people you have in your squad.”**



the Atmospheric Processor blew at the end of *Aliens*.

For the other types of Xenos, they all have a role in the hive like bees or termites, but that isn't where we start. We always ask ourselves “What does it add to gameplay?” and then we figure out how it could make sense in the hive hierarchy. That said, we really didn't stray very far.

OPS: We know you've talked with Syd Mead: who else (apart from the voice cast/actors) have you spoken with while you were making *Colonial Marines*?

BB: Brian Martel, one of the owners of Gearbox had a meeting with Ridley Scott just prior to us signing A:CM. This was also prior to even *Prometheus*. Brian and Ridley discussed all manner of things but the part that got them both excited the most was revisiting the *Alien* universe. Brian got the inside scoop on what Ridley's vision was and we took it from there. We aren't quite sure but it's nice to think that conversation was the seed that started *Prometheus*.

OPS: Inside the colony on LV426 we're looking at either gunmetal panels or lots of dark alien goop sticking people to the walls. How do you use colour or lighting to keep the world interesting?

BB: Visual fatigue is something you have to be careful with when you work with

dark scary games. There are a lot of tricks we use to make sure that players don't get tired. Key lights are almost never static in A:CM. There is always something happening to them, whether it's a florescent light flicker with its colour changing as the light warms up and cools down, or the atmospherics in the scene are drifting through the lit areas. Colour of lights, tone mapping of spaces, and how they are composed in a scene convey information to the player that is useful. If you pay attention, there are visual cues everywhere for where Xenos could come from, or tricks to trap players into false senses of security. Lighting in A:CM serves the gameplay.

OPS: We noticed that we could pick the sentry gun back up after a firefight. Is the gun a tool that can be placed anywhere in a level? How much freedom does the player have with using this?

BB: When the player comes across a Sentry Gun in A:CM they can pick it up and move it wherever they wish to strategically defend against the Xenomorphs. Since the Xenos aren't dumb, they will quickly stop running into the Sentry Gun's bullets. When that happens, it's best to move it someplace more useful. Just like in the film the Sentry Guns don't have infinite ammo, so use them wisely.



OPS: Tension was pretty high during our solo play-through. How do you keep this up with co-op? Does it affect the tone or feeling of being overwhelmed by a murderous species compared to playing solo?

BB: The single player experience changes quite a bit in co-op. Xenos are always extremely lethal no matter how many people you have in your squad. When you work as a squad and use your tools, like the Motion Tracker or Sentry Gun, the depth of the experience is increased. You will feel like an ultimate bad-ass. However, Xenos also get smarter, so you'll need to stay frosty! 

► TOP TEN

EASTER EGGS OF 2012

Easter Eggs are typically a sign of great respect between developers, an insight into the media the developers were consuming when they made the game, a look back at the past, or an indication that long hours drove the developers insane. 2012's best Easter Eggs run the full spectrum.



1

Mists of Borderlandia

Borderlands 2 was filled with incredible Easter Eggs, but we can't go past this uniquely Aussie reference. This stencil of Wastelander Panda is a hat-tip to a team of local filmmakers who impressed Gearbox with their work on the yet-to-be-released video series.



2

Nuketown 1982

Shoot all the heads off the mannequins in *Black Ops II*'s Nuketown 2025 fast enough and you're given the chance to play through some old-skool Activision classics. Playing *Pitfall* makes more sense than playing *Zork* on a controller in *Black Ops I*.



4

The Journey Never Ends

Make sure you take a gander through every telescope you find in minimalist title *The Unfinished Swan*. Near the end, you'll encounter one that zooms in on a lovely little tableau of two wanderers in *Journey*. Too charming for words.



3

We All Scream For Ice Cream

See the vultures in *Hitman: Absolution*'s 'End of the Road' mission? Startle them and then shoot them all in the air. An ice cream truck comes barrelling through, putting Lenny – wait for it – on ice. Get it? Ice?



5

Save It For The Blooper Reel

Replaying *Uncharted: Golden Abyss* on Crushing doesn't just up the difficulty – it also adds a blooper scene into Chapter 31, where a certain dead explorer jumps up and gives Chase's 'actress' a fright. Fourth wall: broken.



6

Borrowing From A Thief

Sneak around *Dishonored*'s Flooded District, and you may well stumble across an apprentice assassin being trained. The dialog of the trainer is, more or less, lifted from the tutorial from *Thief: The Dark Project*. Ahhh, Thief.



7

Get Over Here!

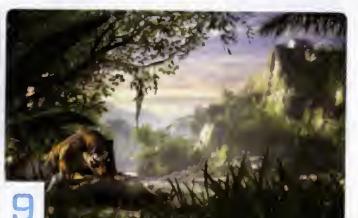
Mortal Kombat on Vita didn't make it into Australian homes, but if you were naughty and imported it, the characters from the game did. Go to practice, hit A , then hold L1 and R1 while selecting a level. Hey presto, it's MK, in your house, in real life, and augmented reality!



8

I Did Nawht Hit Her

Climb the right ladder in Lansdale Street in the okay-ish *Silent Hill: Downpour* and you'll find yourself in the room that hapless Henry Townshend was trapped in during *Silent Hill 4: The Room*. We guess Henry never knew about that ladder, then?



9

...Men Becoming Wolves

At the start of *Far Cry 3*'s 'Home Delivered' side-mission, there's a neat little Easter Egg for *30 Rock* fans. 'There's this pool, supposed to be sacred,' says the quest holder. 'Ruins at the bottom, spooky scary stuff, like a Werewolf Bar Mitzvah.'



10

Assassin's Beak

We dig any game that asks us to input the Konami Code, even if it doesn't quite work on a DualShock. Head to the homestead, press up against a wall and use your whistle to summon a turkey, then enter ↑↑↓↓←→←→◎ and X Bam! Assassin turkey!

► INFOCUS

Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2

Let's not beat around the bush: the first *Sniper: Ghost Warrior* was garbage. We know it and you know it. This time around, though, we're assured things will be different. Changes have been made, criticisms addressed, problems resolved.

For example: all those glitches and bugs? Gone. CryTek's CryEngine 3 is stable as a rock. Oh, and the supernaturally accurate AI that could hipshot you with a shotgun from three miles away? Also gone. Even the story, which was atrocious in the first game, has been penned by "acclaimed writers" this time.

Sounds promising, but the proof is in the pudding, as they say. Look out for our full review next month.



▶ IN REALITY

Odds of surviving a Big Cat attack

When we saw the recent film adaptation of *Life of Pi*, we couldn't help but sympathise with the lad when he was trapped on the boat with a tiger. We spent the tail end of 2012 being mauled by cougars in *Assassin's Creed III*, getting taken down by the Golden Tiger in *Far Cry 3*, and losing our Pomeranian mates to all kinds of cats in *Tokyo Jungle*. These games treat big cat attacks as the potentially serious encounters that they are, but may also exaggerate how easy it is to fight one off.

Tiger attacks are a lot rarer these days than they used to be, largely because people are better at avoiding being attacked altogether, but when a big cat means business it often gets the job done. The tiger labelled the 'Man-eater of Calcutta', for instance, claimed over 200 human lives before it was captured in 1903. In fact, there were quite a few reports of tigers with legendary kill rates back then – unable to hunt natural prey because of broken teeth, the 'Champawat Tiger' killed an incredible 436 people in India until it was hunted down in 1907.

It would be more realistic if Jason got through his encounters with the numerous cats that beset him throughout *Far Cry 3* by simply standing his ground and making a lot of noise. If it weren't for his guns, Jason would be in a fair amount of danger from the



Just squirt it a few times with a water pistol – cats hate that

various man-eating big cats scattered around – they especially like to attack people who are alone – but the island is also filled with other prey, which to the game's credit the cats tend to prefer (cats only go after humans if they have no other choice). Once an up-close attack actually starts there's not much you can do beyond shielding yourself and clobbering them in the face in the hope of doing some real damage. Even being bitten or scratched once is enough to do permanent damage, but then Jason is being shot constantly as well with no long term effect.

In any case, big cat attacks never make for easy fights. Perhaps *Tokyo Jungle*'s one-hit kill system is the

most accurate depiction of what real animal attacks are like (although those little dogs are a tad more powerful than they would be in reality). On the other hand, these game characters suffer through more big cat attacks during the game than the rest of the world does during the entire year – in 2012, bigcatrescue.org charted 19 worldwide incidents in which big cats caused trouble by escaping from enclosures, mauling or killing humans. But then, since 1990, no incidents have been reported outside of the mainland continents – we suppose if there really was some sort of *Far Cry*-esque situation unfolding in the Pacific Islands, we'd likely not hear about it.  **James O'Connor**

What Happens In Vegas...

In October 2003, the stage performance career of Siegfried and Roy was ended when their seven year old tiger, Montecore, bit Roy on the neck during an act. There's some debate over what prompted the lion to do so – it seems likely that the tiger believed Roy was in danger for some reason and tried to pick him up by the neck, like a cub. We're expecting a similar dynamic if Team Ico ever finishes *The Last Guardian...*

▶ NUMBER CRUNCHING

30,000+

▶ Number of Trophies you'll need to reach the level cap of 100 on the worldwide PSN leaderboards. Only two people have managed it so far: BIELERIC with 33,334 and Pockidrive with 32,636.



1.1 billion

▲ Amount (in US dollars) Sony made selling its iconic US headquarters on Maddison Ave in New York City. The sale is reported to boost the company's operating income by \$685 million.

Separated at Birth

NO. 49 *GTA IV*'s Niko and *Behind Enemy Lines*'Vladimir Mashkov



One is an eastern European veteran in pursuit of the American Dream, escaping a life of violence for one with more violence. The other is the right hand man for a Bosnian leader, previously in a prison camp and sporting a blue Adidas jacket. Both have heavy accents and extensive experience in executions because every eastern European has seemingly killed someone at some point in their lives.

YOU DIDN'T LISTEN TO YOUR CAREER ADVISOR.
YOU PLAYED GAMES INSTEAD OF STUDYING.

SO NOW YOU MUST...



SHOW THE WORLD WHAT YOU'RE MADE OF.
MINIMUM WAGE WAR ON DIRT!

13.11.13

► OPINION

A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

Just because videogames aren't part of the problem doesn't mean they can't be part of the solution.

Bioarchaeological research has shown that interpersonal violence has been common throughout the entire history of our species. Human violence is an inexorable aspect of human society and culture. The archaeological record clearly indicates that this has always been true. Cannibalism, mass killings, homicides, and assault injuries are exceedingly well documented in both the ancient and modern worlds.

The people we share our DNA with have been clubbing, stabbing, and scooping each other's brains out with admittedly alarming regularity throughout all of history. Today's tools may be deadlier, but our humans aren't.

That the US video game industry elected to meet with Vice President Joe Biden as US lawmakers scramble to do something – anything – about the country's devastating gun violence problem is hardly surprising, I guess. After years of being blamed for turning Americans into killers (mostly by people

who see no harm in letting any moron who can put one foot in front of the other buy a military-grade firearm) the opportunity to speak to somebody who mattered was likely an attractive one.

The problem, of course, is that by accepting an invitation to speak to the VP about what the games industry can do about gun violence, the industry is associating itself with gun violence. Does making the games industry a part of the solution mean it's a part of the problem?

Perhaps. Perhaps not. Either way, video gaming has an image problem.

I don't believe that game violence is the root of real world violence. It's not just an absurd position to adopt; it's an offensive one. That some people are willing to waste so much time rallying against a world of make-believe in the childlike belief that nerfing violent videogames will be the silver bullet that puts a stop to gun-toting crazies is nothing short of ludicrous. These people need some air holes poked into their skulls, because the magical fairies that run the show in there are running out

of oxygen. It's not just offensive to an entire industry of creative professionals, or a world of regular, law-abiding consumers, but to the people out there every day campaigning for the kinds of social changes that are far more likely to make a difference. Improvements to mental health. Prioritising education. Advocates for more responsible gun laws.

I do, however, believe that it could do a lot more to prevent it. Or at least, try to prevent it. The use of violence is the core completion mechanic for a vast number of today's most popular games. There's little choice in the matter; you just have to participate in the violence to proceed.

It's not every game, mind you. *Dishonored* is a recent example of a title that allowed players to reach the end of the game without killing a single soul.

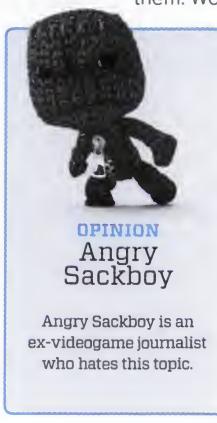
This makes every act of violence in *Dishonored* a personal choice. Perhaps more games should do this. Perhaps players ought to be allowed to kill less rather than encouraged to kill more. Perhaps developers

should factor in these kinds of possibilities during development. Perhaps the more realistic our games get the more sobering the violence should be.

I recall being disturbed somewhat by the wounded cops in the original *Kane & Lynch: Dead Men*. I noted that, while writhing around on the ground, a female cop would often gasp that she had a daughter. Unfortunately, the game's logic meant there was no other way to deal with these cops other than shoot them. Would better AI allow us to simply suppress opponents that players would prefer not to kill long enough for them to escape? Would giving the players greater freedom allow them to play potentially violent action games in a less-confrontational manner?

All too often gamers, the games industry and the games press get blinded by the fear of censorship to such an extent that we all miss the fact that we have an opportunity to find cool and creative ways to be a part of a solution. We need more games that challenge us, and force us to think about our actions, and developers need to make them. 

“Perhaps players ought to be allowed to kill less rather than encouraged to kill more.”



OPINION
Angry
Sackboy

Angry Sackboy is an ex-videogame journalist who hates this topic.

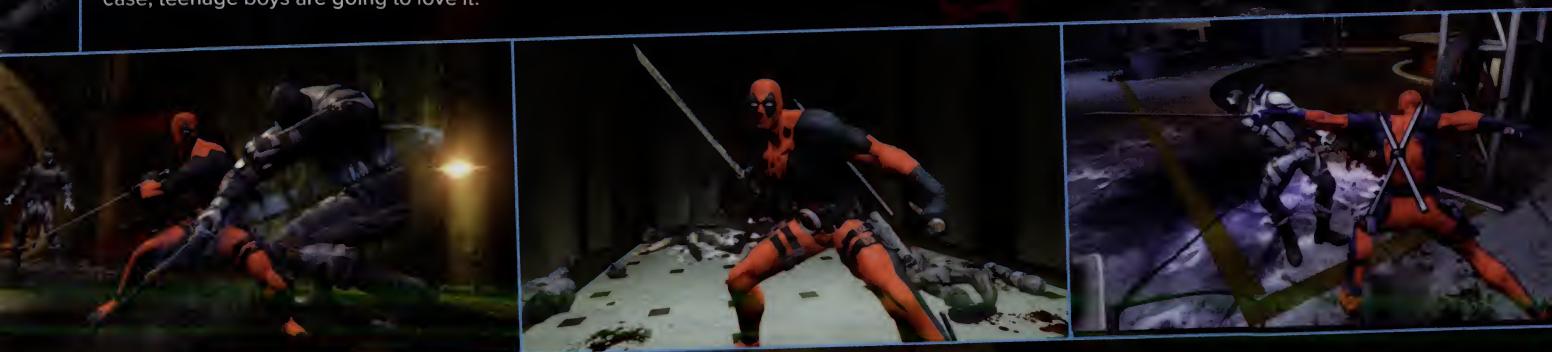
► INFOCUS

Deadpool

Many games have tried to be funny, but few have succeeded. Why? Three reasons: poor writing, incessant repetition, and hackneyed delivery. With *Deadpool*, High Moon Studios has taken steps to avoid all three of these defects.

For example, *Deadpool* comic scribe Daniel Way has been hired to look over the game's script and make sure it's up to snuff. Also, rather than have the same one-liners repeated ad nauseam, High Moon has gone to pains ensuring dialogue is as dynamic and contextually relevant as possible. Finally, Nolan North is onboard as the voice of Deadpool, and he's *clearly relishing the role*.

We're not sold yet, but there is potential. In any case, teenage boys are going to love it.





► OPINION

ENTER A NEW CHALLENGER

In the brawl for next gen, who's gonna win – or is there even a fight at all?

Next gen has a new fighter. In between smart phones, tablets, the PS4, Wii U (technically, sort of) and whatever the hell Microsoft are doing, Valve's Steam Box comes swaggering in from out of the internet rumours and hearsay. It might even dissolve the term 'next gen' completely.

Haven't heard of it? Gabe Newell revealed the concept roughly a month ago at the Consumer Electronic's Show in Las Vegas. While the *Portal 2* creators will develop its own line of hardware, some of the production is being done by third parties, with multiple specs of the box available depending on your budget. The ultimate goal is to have a low-cost PC that connects to Valve's online store, Steam, to buy its often dirt-cheap games from there. It's also upgradeable, meaning if you want to improve the RAM or even the motherboard, you can get your screwdriver and go for it.

So what of 'next gen'? Should Sony be worried? Should you?

The Steam Box effectively says there is no one singular 'next gen'

or at least no monumental leaps in processing power or raw grunt like there normally is between launches of boxes that sit below your TV. Instead, it's all iterations. Smartphones have been doing it for a while, albeit enclosed in one unit and – unless you have pockets deeper than Bruce Wayne – two-year contracts.

On one hand it's exciting – any new hardware is. But the concept is flawed, and it's because of one of the reasons that people wrongly think that mobiles are going to take over consoles: fragmentation. Hardware that can be built upon, allowing for iteration as rapid as mobile phones, leads to a fragmented user base, which is the same problem that the Android system has at the moment. There's not going to be one common spec for devs to work towards while punters have many possible configurations of hardware available.

As for owning one, how often are you going to have to upgrade? And at what cost? Are you going to be locked in to buying parts from the same manufacturer, or will there be a 'Steam

box' template common to all types?

Meanwhile, in console-land, everyone's running on the same gear. Everyone has the same restrictions and freedom, the ease of turning it

“In console land I don't need to go hunting for drivers. I can lend my games to my friends, and I can borrow theirs”

on and knowing that it's just going to work bar the occasional update. I like consoles for this. I don't need to build it. I don't need to go hunting for and updating drivers, or be bothered by conflicting video cards, always-on DRM because devs don't want pirates stealing their games, or files not installing properly. I can lend my games to my friends, and I can borrow theirs.

Like James Cottee wrote last month, competition is healthy. More of it please, because it makes everyone work hard. But you're going to struggle with this one Valve. See you round, like an Orbis. 



OPINION
Paul Taylor

Pressing buttons once and watching whatever they turn on immediately come to life pleases Paul Taylor.

GIVING HOPE

IS AS EASY AS GIVING YOUR OLD MOBILE PHONE



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Cue, the slow, sour realisation that the **Platinum is out of reach**

LETTER OF THE MONTH

TROPHIES

Hey OPS,

I'm a trophy collector. I love the ring of a trophy after a hard level grind, or the 'bling' you get after collecting 6,000 collectables.

But the thing that annoys me most about them are online trophies.

Recently, the servers for *Motorstorm: Pacific Rift* and *Ghostbusters: The Video Game* were closed down. In the circumstances of *Ghostbusters*, very little notice was given. It is a game I will never be able to platinum. Yet the game continues to be sold.

The issue I have here is that when games decide to give online trophies, you're giving the game a lifespan. One day the *GTA IV* servers will close and that platinum trophy will be unattainable.

Same can be said for *Killzone 2*, *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* and *Call of Duty: Black Ops* and a torrent of other games (especially if they involve an EA franchise).

Why can't a game have trophies for offline, and a rewards system for online? That way no one misses out.

Russell Hamley, via email

There's some merit to this, especially for games that primarily have a single-

player focus, but what about games that are made entirely for online play? When you say 'rewards system', do you want something that isn't trophies? With that in mind, should *MAG*, or the upcoming *Dust 514*, not have trophies at all? Or do you give two trophy lists, and depending on the game have two platinums? It's doubtful something like this could happen, as the structure of trophies and the way they're embedded into the system as a whole is pretty set.

The office is split on this. Some of us are content to go as far as we can in the single player side of a game and just let the multiplayer side of things rot, while others see it as an itch they just have to scratch, sometimes playing something they're not that into just to get the full lot. Seems like you fall into the second camp, and we're about to give you a game that's going to require some online play to get the Plat. Congratulations, and yet sorry, at the same time.

BOMBS AWAY

Hello OPS,

I would like to say you guys are totally awesome at helping pick the right games. I found that *Medal of Honor: Warfighter* is the hardest game ever as I can't get past the fricken

second level. I keep trying but I just can't snipe. Plus *Assassin's Creed III* was such a wicked game, it made up for *Revelations*. P.S. Sackboy will always be an awesome mascot with average games.

Nathan Hedley, via email

Hey, hey, woah there. You started out just fine, then dropped a bomb on us at the end that could level a city. Sounds like you're trying to serve Angry Sackboy, and that's social suicide.

First things first. Your problem with *Medal of Honor: Warfighter* is that you're playing *Medal of Honor: Warfighter*. Paul found that he had to fail that section roughly a dozen times before the game held his hand in pity and skipped merrily past it.

Yes, *AC III* was the bizzness, and that's all we have to say about that.

In all seriousness, Sackboy's only starred in one so-so game (*LittleBigPlanet Karting*, which was neither bad nor great, just, well so-so) while the rest have been tip top. *LittleBigPlanet 2* is one critical reason for owning a PS3, and *PlayStation All-Stars Battle Royale* shines in multiplayer.

Still, we're happy you think he's a great mascot, and we do too.

PARENTS, TAKE NOTE

Hello OPS,

I hear parents complaining all too often about the violence in videogames. How they would never have allowed their young child (usually 7-13 years of age) to buy a particular game had they known the sheer amount of gore, violence and sexuality in it. This usually invokes a feeling of anger from me, as they soon proceed to claim that the industry is corrupting our children. I'm a young mum of two, soon to be three small children (under three), so I don't pretend to know what it's like to



**LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS:
DEAD SPACE 3**

Read all about it on p72!



deal with a moody and demanding preteen. But damn it, that's no excuse anymore! It's not like how it was when I was a child where a parents only option to find out the level of violence in a video game was to either play it themselves or sit and watch their child play it.

Parents cannot plead ignorance any longer and neither should gamers accept such excuses. The internet is easily accessed these days, with more than most having that access on hand at all times. We all have smart phones, tablets or computers at our disposal, finding out the content of a game is as simple as typing it into Google. If by some freakish chance you don't have one of those things there are TV shows dedicated to reviewing video games, there are magazines (such as this one) that review games and include still shots from games (usually combat shots). The government even changed the colouring of our classification system which CLEARLY outlines their recommendation for the age appropriateness of a game and gives a brief warning about the level of violence and other themes.

And, should all else fail, it is not hard to ask the store clerk in the gaming section about the game content. Most clerks that work in stores which distribute videogames tend of play these games themselves and would be more than happy to help answer any questions, that's what my mother used to do.

Parents are very quick to pass on the blame and videogames are an easy scapegoat, the media frequently touts the horrors of videogames. But the true blame lies with the parents, the industry self regulates to a certain extent. The rest is up to us.

I don't want the future of Australia's gaming industry to be at the mercy of lobbying parents and adults too lazy to type a few words into Google before buying a game for their child.

The next time you hear a complaint from parents crying ignorance about game content please remind them how easy it is to find out about game content and ratings, and that that excuse got old really fast and is no longer acceptable.

Stephanie Greenaway, via email

NEXT GEN

Hey there OPS,

So, the next gen of consoles. It's coming, isn't it? The rumours (because that's all they are until Sony says 'hey here's the PlayStation 4') are streaming out thicker and faster than they were a year ago, and after six years of glorious gaming I'm still itching to get something new. Got a mad wish list too, and I saw some on your Facebook wall as well.

Some of those rumours are pretty wacky though, aren't they? A touch screen on the controller, like the Wii U, doesn't seem right, plus biometrics for measuring your pulse and stuff is out there. And, on the controller, replacing the DualShock?

But what I really want is 4K gaming. 3D looks like it's dead in the water cause hardly anyone's really pushing it like they used to. I'm not really into photorealistic stuff, but an image that's crisper and clearer will immerse me more. E3's gonna rock. **Sarah Mead**, via email

Yep, you're right, they are just rumours until we hear more solid news. The rumblings we've heard point towards PC architecture so that games can be made faster (which makes sense) but a touch-screen controller does not float our boat. Firstly because the PS Vita could do that job, and secondly it feels like a gimmick to have it in the controller.

We also doubt that the DualShock is going to be ditched. That'd be like Macca's not having the golden arches. But, yeah, roll on E3. Should be a good 'un.

Cuttings

► Pan handled

LEGO Lord of the Rings with my brother. Beating up Frodo as Sam with a frying pan is hard to top.

Daniel Hanson, via Facebook

Ah, domestic violence, the wicked witch of comedy.

► Get your thumb ready

Cannot believe you guys didn't mention Steve Irwin animal "lover" from Vice City in your Aussies in gaming article!

Anders Haywood, via Facebook

There were a few we wanted to get in, including the rogueish Buck from Far Cry 3.

► Out of the ordinary

PS Vita needs a God Of War game.

Alex Ioannou, via Facebook

Too right it does. Frankly, it's just a matter of time.

► Lost in development #1

Has *Furious 4* completely dropped off the face of the planet?

Pappington McDeathslash von Bloodkill, via Facebook

We've heard nowt.

► Lost in Development #2

Where is *FFX* for PS Vita?

Stuart Sneddon, via Facebook

Square promised answers soon.

Official PlayStation Magazine - Australia on



▼ Storefront

What deliciousness have you bought lately?



Daniel Rogerson
Need For Speed Most Wanted
"The game doesn't disappoint!"



Steven Charleson
Syndicate
"I bought Syndicate because *shhhh*"



Adam Luttrell
Limbo
"Got it for the trophy you get for going the wrong way."



Christian Bojko
DmC
"I like it more than the original series."

▼ Caption This

You put the words to the screen. Simple.



"Sorry little girl, you must be *this* high to die"

David Dyer goes to a dark place and, ironically, finds laughter.

in coming

This Month

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- 44 Disney Infinity



The Pitch

An unforgettable amnesiac experience

Info

INFO

FORMAT: PS3
GENRE: ACTION-ADVENTURE
RELEASE: TBA MAY
DISTRIBUTOR: AIE
DEVELOPER: DONTNOD
ENTERTAINMENT
PLAYERS: 1

Remember Me

Don't you forget about me

When you're making a game that's heavy on the fisticuffs it can only be a good thing to have *Streeties* producer Yoshinori Ono stop by to offer advice. That's like if you're building a mammogram simulator and having *Dead or Alive* creator Tomonobu Itagaki rock up and offer his hands on experience.

Though it's only recently entered the Capcom fold and made the acquaintance of Ono-san, French developer Dontnod Entertainment has already seen fit to reward the *Street Fighter* series with a nod (or 'dontnod' as it were). Its inaugural action-adventure, *Remember Me*, stars a British bombshell named Nilin who – when she's not on the run from the 'memory agents' (who must surely be affiliated with the Dream Police, who live inside of your head) – engages in the odd, high-stakes street fight.

Recent assets for the game show a mano-a-mano, futuristic showdown complete with a virtual billboard showcasing fighter mugshots divided by a more-than-a-little familiar 'VS' font. The contestants in this case: the palindrome

princess, Nilin, and a beefcake new boss character called Kid Xmas. Great stage name, dude. To beat you we're guessing a kick in your proverbial Santa sack is required, at which point we'll be showered with pressens (*Remember Me*'s odd name for 'fighting moves').

Apparently the kid has his own hacking channel, Channel Fear, which airs everyday at 9pm in Neo-Paris. For whatever reason he's previously acquainted with Nilin and wants to kick her arse on international television. What follows is some blisteringly fast kick combos from our heroine which have no doubt been previously constructed in *Remember Me*'s rather spiffy looking do-it-yourself combo creator.

Interestingly, and despite the deadly riot squads and bullet spewing VTOLs chasing her, we've still yet to see Nilin pop a cap in somebody, let alone hold a firearm. There's a pacifism to her that makes us recall Faith from *Mirror's Edge*, though the comparison wavers a little when you realise that Nilin seems quite okay with tampering with people's memories and forcing them to shoot themselves in an act of grief.

"[Nilin's morality] will be shades of grey," says

“The last remnants of privacy have been swept away in a **logical progression of the explosive growth of social networks**”



Creative Director Jean-Maxime Moris. “She won’t be just that very nice world-saving person. And she won’t be a mass-murderer. The only person she kills in the game is that guy in the demo released a little while ago. There is no killing. We wanted to stay away from the generic violence that is flowing into most of today’s video games. We really want to ask moral questions about her, about how she acts.”

Dontnod also hopes to raise questions about social networks: how they will evolve in the future and what we do with them today. Moris wants to avoid the old antagonist cliché of “this is the corporation, now go and kick their asses”. Rather, *Remember Me* is going to make you mull upon such questions as ‘is technology good for us’ and ‘should we all blindly just upload ourselves onto the Internet?’

In the case of *Remember Me*’s universe, we’re guessing the answer

to that question is a big fat ‘no’. In Dontnod’s vision of the future everybody has brain implants which make it possible to delete, trade or exchange one’s own memories – and most likely a buttload of cat related material – all whilst being controlled by a corporation called Memoryeyes. The last remnants of privacy have been swept away in what appears to be a logical progression of the explosive growth of social networks at the beginning of the 21st century. The citizens themselves have accepted this surveillance society in exchange for the comfort only smart technology can provide. Also: the rampant sexting must be a pretty big plus, too.

Moris also says that amid the melee, light stealth elements and platforming, there are several of the aforementioned ‘memory remix’ moments. Apparently they are to be climaxes that appear at the end of certain levels. Remixes are the rough

equivalent to boss fights, action cliffhangers that will wrap a chapter just before you head on to your next mark.

Frankly, we like the idea of losing ourselves in this near-future, and going on the lam as memory-master Nilin. Firstly, because this cyberpunk neo-Paris looks absolutely resplendent, none of the tiresome, perpetual rain and *Blade Runner* darkness seems to apply. Secondly, the intrigue of finding out who our protagonist really is by basically raping and remixing the memories of her enemies seems like a fresh new way to shape a story. Thirdly, we like the idea that when Nilin non-lethally snots somebody, they’re not dead. According to Moris they’ll get up much later on with a few broken bones and “probably missing the memory that they’re married”. That’s quite the super power, and we can’t wait to learn how to use it (on ourselves, in the real world) soon. **Clint McCreadie**

They Say

“[With *Remember Me*] we want to show] it’s possible to have a French studio that doesn’t just focus on crazy concepts but also on appealing to the wider world.”

We Say

Finally, somebody said it. Though your game may not be wacky, 10 bucks says you still have some nude boobs in there. No French designer can resist the urge.

Verdict



Defiance

Welcome to the wild west – with lasers

Here's a new concept: a game and TV show based in the same universe as each other – and each having a crucial role in the development of the series. Both are set on a future Earth after decades of turmoil, where due to an act of reluctant aggression an alien collective, the Votans, has terraformed the planet.

The game is a third-person MMO shooter and provides most of the shooty bits, while the TV show lays out the scenario and individual story lines. Both will influence each other; key events from one being referenced in its partner, though the game is set in San Francisco and the TV show in St. Louis. Amazingly, characters from the game – that is, the players – may even make an appearance on the show.

US-based Syfy channel has snared Rockne S. O'Bannon, a TV sci-fi writer probably best-known for *SeaQuest DSV*

The Pitch

Looting and shooting in a massive open world that's also intertwined with an accompanying TV show.

Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: RPG

RELEASE: TBA APRIL

DISTRIBUTOR: TBA

DEVELOPER: TRION WORLDS

PLAYERS: 1 - TBA

and *Farscape*, amongst others, to pen episodes that will premier in April this year. Meanwhile, Trion Worlds are crafting their own storyline, with boids from Syfy course correcting on the way.

Because of the conflict between Votans and humans, two disparate worlds have been mashed together – the animals and plants that the Votans (themselves seven individual species) brought on their ship when they were looking for refuge and stumbled upon Earth, and the location and iconography of our blue planet. It's a science fiction drama in a new frontier, according to various Trion and Syfy talking heads.

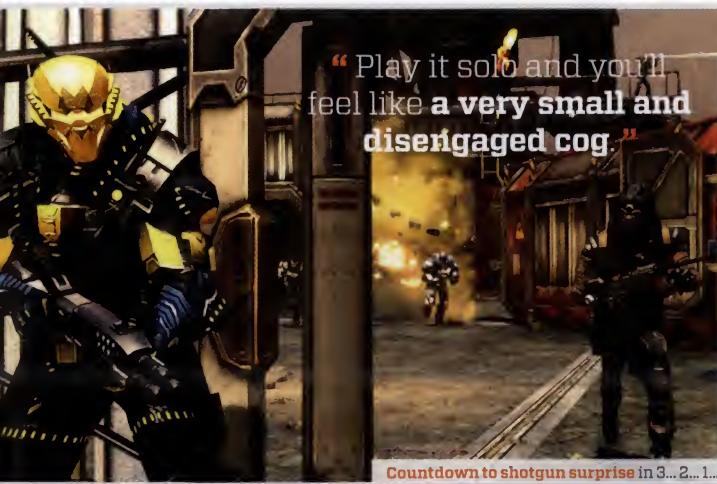
It's an admirable if risky concept, and like the inhabitants of its future Earth it steps into a turbulent world that's finding its feet. Firstly, only a mere fistful of other MMORPGs have gone before it – *Final Fantasy XI* and *DC Universe Online* – and their successes haven't been particular stellar. Secondly, how strong is the relationship between the game and show? If one goes totes up, what does that mean for the other if characters and events are intertwined?

In practice, the game aims to be a solid, third-person shooter where you are a bounty hunter, but one filled with thousands of other players all taking part in quests at the same time. You could think of the structure being similar to *Borderlands* – levelling-up a character as you go on a quest to shoot whatever-the-hell alien it is in the face. Rather than you being labeled as a certain class with a heavily prescribed role you have a particular skill (much like Gearbox's vault hunters), offering variations of ability that riff around subterfuge and



Great camouflage if you happen to be in a firefight at El Dorado





Countdown to shotgun surprise in 3...2...1...



Please Hammer, don't hurt 'em'

physical movement. You're free to pick up and become proficient with any weapon, and also heal your comrades with the appropriate tool.

Quests are mostly set up to pit groups of players against something in the world, for example a massive boss battle that draws in as many people as possible on the server. Or, smaller teams might be involved in multi-stage events. Getting to each point is as simple as selecting a quad-bike from your inventory and scooting across the terrain.

Where it struggles is carving out a sense of visual identity, and having combat that feels anything but run-of-the-mill. You'll be familiar with what you can do, like taking cover, or getting hold of a mounted gun. What you're tasked to do is great, and having loads of other people to do it with is even better, but we're unsure how successfully *Defiance* could stand on its own merits. Play it solo and you'll feel like a very small and disengaged cog away from the rest of the gang, despite the slow drip of better weapons and attachments waiting to be looted.

Maybe that's to be expected. The clue is in the name of the genre – massively multiplayer – and so-so visuals are hardly a surprise considering the swarm of other players in the wide open world. Still, we're excited to see if this is the MMO that'll be a hit on PS3. **Paul Taylor**

They Say

"You come to the town as an ark hunter to establish law in a frontier town of San Francisco, coming up against alien monsters or factions that want their destruction."

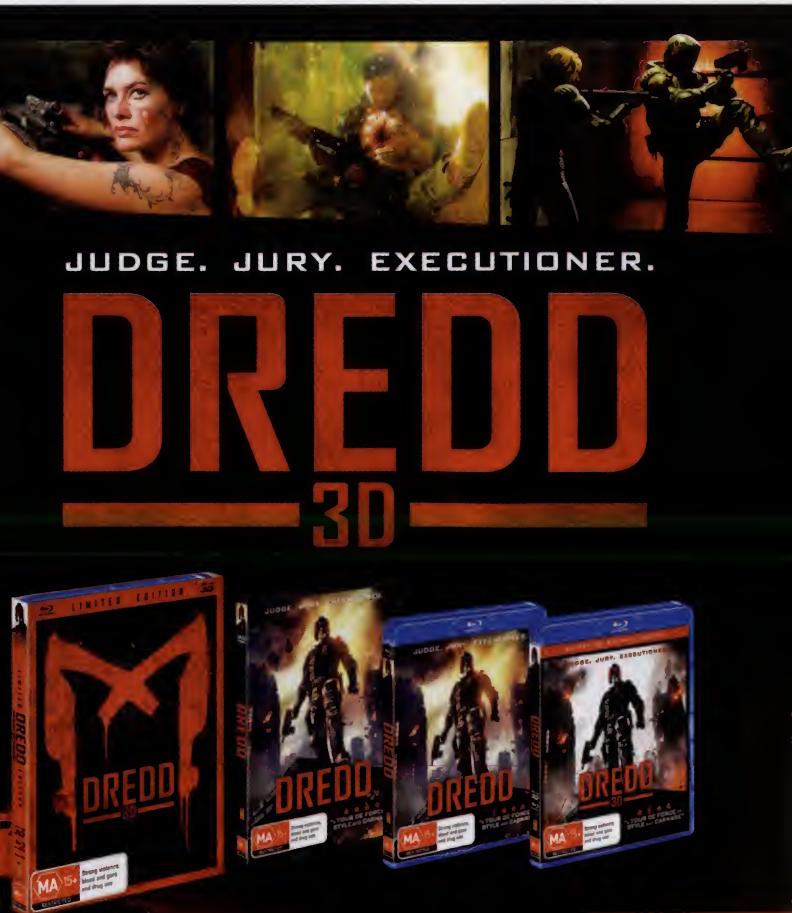
We Say

As a package *Defiance* is risky, despite familiar components. Its success hinges partially on that of the TV show, on the reliability and speed of the servers.

Verdict



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Even as the world teeters on the brink of destruction,
Lightning still finds time to shave her pits

Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII

But do we want her back?

Where to now for *Final Fantasy*? Once considered the apex of Japanese role-playing games, the series has been in decline for some time. Commercially, everything's still hunky-dory, as the sales of both *FFXIII* and *FFXIII-2* demonstrate. The critical picture tells a different story, however.

FFXIII and *XIII-2* aren't bad games per se, but they are terribly, terribly mediocre. God, *XIII* with its "endless corridor" level design and cast of thoroughly unlikeable characters... it makes you wonder: is this the same company that made *Final Fantasy VII*? *Chrono Trigger*? *Vagrant Story*? Because, sometimes, it honestly doesn't seem like it.

Despite its insane production values, *XIII* felt amateurish. Misguided. *XIII-2* was an improvement in certain respects. The world was a lot more open, for example, and the battle system – a slight retooling of *XIII*'s Paradigm/Active Time Battle setup – is pretty elegant, and a pleasure to experiment with. On the downside, the narrative is a convoluted mess, the protagonists are still douchebags, and quest design is still patronising and tedious.

All things considered, it was kind of a mess. Sold a shitload though, so here we are with a new sequel, the "final instalment" of the Lightning saga: *Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII*. Sounds dramatic, doesn't it? Well, judging by the hilariously self-important trailer, it's going to be very dramatic:

The camera zooms in on Lightning. She takes off her sunglasses (!) and stares directly at the viewer, her voice cool and calm. "These are the final thirteen days." <INSERT WICKED GUITAR SOLO>

The whole "final days" thing is a key plot point. Here's the short version: set several hundred years after the conclusion of *XIII*, *Lightning Returns* has the titular heroine racing to save the world from destruction, which has been ordained to happen 13 days after the game begins. Again, that's the

short version. The long version, built on canon established in *FFXIII* and *XIII-2*, is basically nonsense, so we'll skip it for now.

According to game director Motomu Toriyama, *Lightning Returns* has been designed around two core concepts: Lightning Returns and World Driven.

The first is, uh, the title of the game, and is meant to express Lightning's (to quote the official blog) "triumphant new strength" and "ability to overcome great odds". What that means in practice is anyone's guess, but from what we can tell, it seems to boil down to this: Lightning has over 20 costumes, each of which gives her access to new powers and abilities. In other words: dress-ups! Squeeeeeeee.

The second core concept – World Driven – is much more interesting. What it means, more or less, is that the world lives and breathes around you, and reacts to your presence in a variety of interesting ways.

Time is one of the game's strongest conceits. As you explore the world and endeavour to uncover its mysteries, the clock is always ticking. Let it run too long and it's game over. Certain actions, such as saving a particular individual, or beating a boss, or failing to complete a quest, can either give you extra time or take it away.

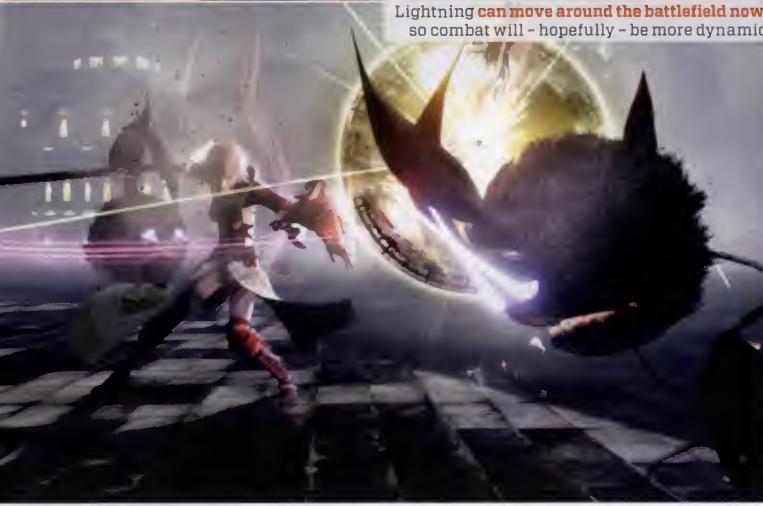
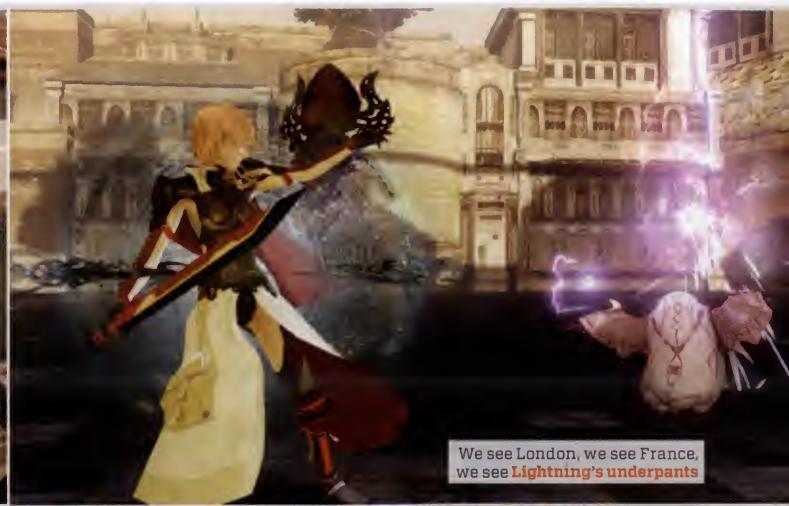
The Pitch

Final Fantasy XIII – We Got It Right This Time edition.

Info

FORMAT: PS3
GENRE: ACTION-RPG
RELEASE: TBA 2013
DISTRIBUTOR: NAMCO BANDAI PARTNERS
DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX
PLAYERS: 1





According to the designers, this mechanic lends *Lightning Returns* a large degree of replayability. The constraints of time make it impossible to see everything in a single run, they say. If this is true, then it sounds very interesting indeed. *Chrono Trigger*-esque, even.

Another interesting thing: Lightning will be the only playable character in the game. Other familiar (obnoxious) faces like Hope Estheim and Snow Villiers will make an appearance, but will never join you on the battlefield.

Battle mechanics have been tweaked to accommodate this new singular focus, and now feature a greater emphasis on movement and action. Everything's still pseudo-real-time, but because Lightning can now move freely in combat, it seems a lot more kinetic and... dare we say... visceral.

This newfound dynamism is also evident in the new command system. Instead of having to select and queue commands from a menu, abilities are now mapped to the face buttons on the controller, the idea being – we think – to make the process of using them a lot more immediate and gratifying. It's a good idea, and based on the footage we've seen, it works pretty well, and less labourious.

Given its pedigree, and the trailer

discussed above, it seems almost certain that *Lightning Returns* is going to be, at best, excruciatingly average. But then you look at features like the ones we just talked about, and suddenly the evidence doesn't seem so conclusive. Maybe there's a glimmer of hope after all.

The dynamic world, the revamped

battle system, the replayability – it all sounds great in theory. There's promise there. But the thing is: we've been burned too many times by *Final Fantasy* to believe in its promises. What we need is proof, and so far Square Enix has failed to supply any.

Here's hoping that changes sometime soon.  **Dan Staines**



They Say

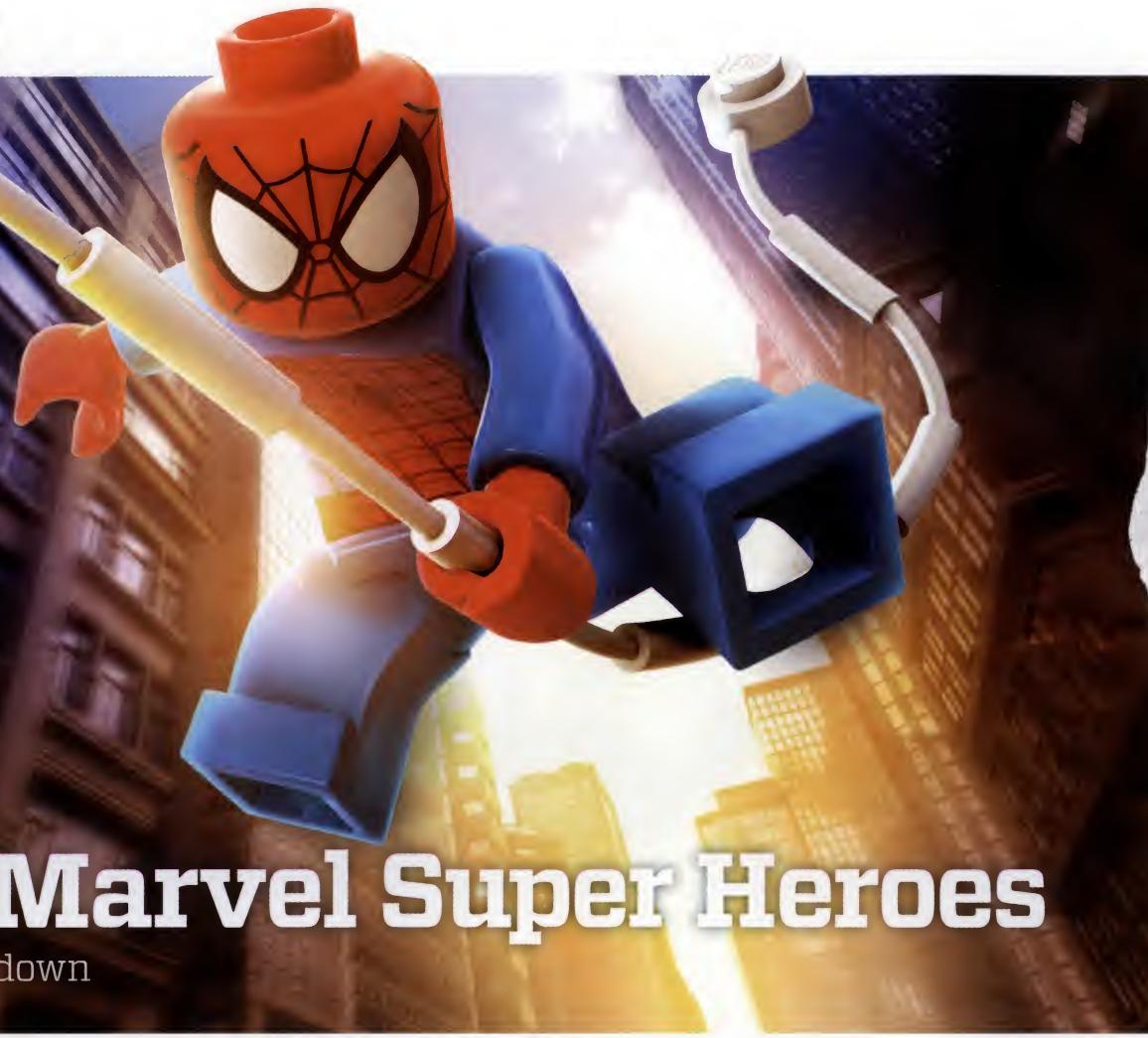
"For newcomers, story primers and helpful information remains through finalfantasyxiii.com on both the original title to *Lightning's* saga as well as the direct sequel featuring her sister Serah."

We Say

In other words: get your readin' glasses on, kids – you've got some lore to cram.

Verdict





LEGO Marvel Super Heroes

Comic book showdown

The Pitch

Traveller's Tales turn a new page and stick Marvel's heroes inside a block-builders paradise.

Info

FORMAT: PS3/PS VITA
GENRE: ACTION
RELEASE: TBA 2013
DISTRIBUTOR: WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT
DEVELOPER: TRAVELLER'S TALES
PLAYERS: 1-4

The LEGO franchise continues to reach new heights, and the first lot of games that made the series look positively antiquated by now. For fans of the LEGO series, *Marvel Super Heroes* is a 'Holy Grail' title for more reasons than one, and while at first glance you might wonder just what Traveller's Tales can do to prevent the LEGO series from being oversaturated or stale, it looks like it's going to be their best yet.

First up, Traveller's Tales is owned by Warner Bros. who in turn own DC Comics – Marvel's absolute rival. So, it's either extreme good will or,

more likely, smart business sense that Warner Bros. is making a game exclusively featuring its competitor's characters. At the heart of the game is The Avengers, the motley crew of Iron Man, Thor, Black Widow, Captain America, The Hulk and more. Considering that the latest Marvel movie is the third-highest grossing movie of all time, awareness and demand is peaking, and a couple of sequels have been given the go ahead. Frankly, on recognition alone *Marvel Super Heroes* will sell.

Good for them, and also good for us as this looks ace, and TT are

smartly digging deeper than the big names. *Super Heroes* promises to feature over 100 different characters, all playable within the stages set in New York City and beyond, though we only know about the characters that appeared in the *Avengers* movie, and other 'must have' characters such as Wolverine, Deadpool and Spider-Man. Everyone's going to have their favourites, and the challenge is making each of them useful and desirable.

All the characters fall into a class of sorts, be it technology, like Black Widow, or flying like Iron Man. Captain America has his shield that can be used as a long-range and melee weapon, while someone like Wolverine has his claws and is near invincible. Each character will be simultaneously empowered and limited by their skills, so while someone like Thor can throw a very heavy hammer and knock chumps out, the Asgard champion is going to be clueless when it comes to opening an electronically locked door.

Then you have someone like Spider-Man, whom TT is giving a lot of freedom. Rather than restricting his web-swinging to specific areas of the city he's going to be able to plant his web anywhere he likes, and launch at will. As you'd expect, he can also wrap the bad guys up in his web, and his iconic 'spider sense' will also feature. Flying characters are also going to be able to zip around, so we're expecting the stages to be pretty big

When Captain America plays frisbee, he plays for keeps





“*Super Heroes* promises to feature over 100 different characters, all playable”

to accommodate them exploring a larger landscape than usual.

That in itself is a technical challenge, but it's not the only one that TT faces. Traditionally each of the characters conforms to being of a similar height to the next, dubbed 'minifigs' after their real-life LEGO counterpart, albeit with a few limited exceptions (such as the cave troll in LEGO Harry Potter). In *Super Heroes*, however, at least one of them stands a good head and shoulders above the rest, and makes a regular appearance: The Hulk.

Hulk – a 'bigfig' – takes up more space than his counterparts whilst still retaining his character traits and the typical LEGO aesthetic. His super-strength and physicality define him, and it's this that TT has to build into each level. It goes from the stuff you'd expect him to do, like having areas so for him to smash through a wall, or ripping panels and parts of the stage to pieces, to the more mundane, like making sure that the geometry of the level is wide enough for him to get through.

It's a lot to consider for just one character, so we're expecting a number of the larger guys to further justify these design choices. Concept art hints at one of Spider-Man's foes, the Sandman, poking his way into the world, and it would be a sin if one of Marvel's other super-strong men, The Thing, didn't appear too.

What's even more impressive is that these digital figurines, for all of their stumpy legs and rounded shoulders, move differently to each other. They're more than just re-skinned versions of the same



TRUFAX: Wolverines are **gentle, friendly animals**. If you see one in the wild, you should totally give it a cuddle

model. The Hulk has massive shoulders and walks with power in his stride, while you'd swear Iron Man/Tony Stark has an undeniable swagger.

Tying it all together is the story that's being written by Mark Hoffmeier, who has worked on *Spider-Man: The Animated Series* and *Marvel Super Hero Squad*. The characters in *LEGO Marvel* are familiar to him, but the game will have its own identity.

TT's record has proven that you can't take its 'cutesy' style for granted. Their games are made with a lot of love, packed with funny moments and references that hardcore fans will get a kick out of, and the leap from *LEGO Batman 2* to *Lord of the Rings* was big enough to show they've still got loads of ideas left to wow their audience with. This could be the LEGO game you've been waiting for.

• **Paul Taylor**



No nail is safe from Thor's **mighty hammer**

They Say

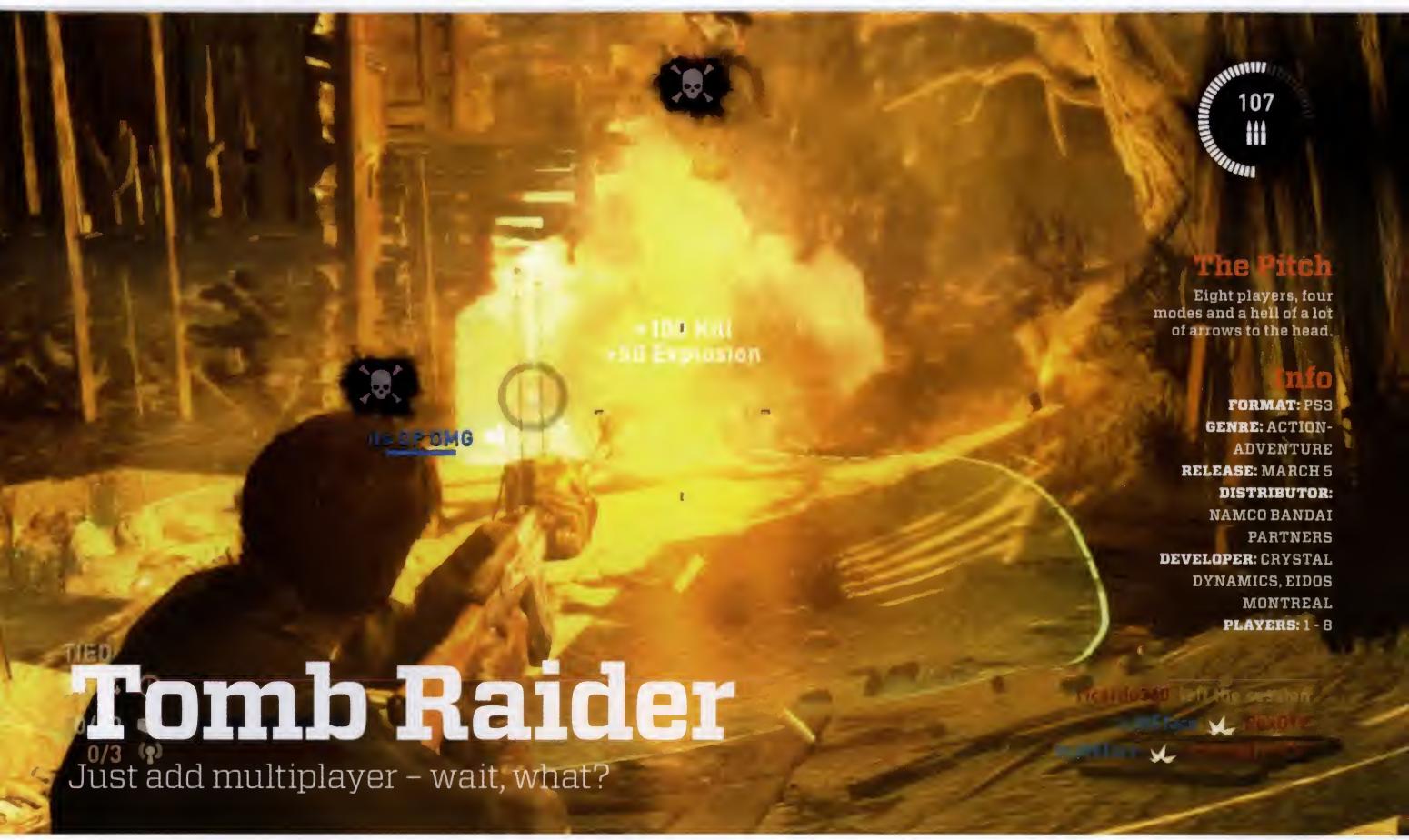
If you're a fan of Spider-Man, the Avengers, Fantastic Four, X-Men, Guardians of the Galaxy or scores of other Marvel characters, this is the game for you."

We Say

This is TT's most ambitious LEGO game yet. With over 100 characters of different shapes and sizes we're anticipating some pretty incredible stages to fly, fire and smash through.

Verdict





Tomb Raider

Just add multiplayer – wait, what?

It's a big call from Creative Director, Noah Hughes, but one that might just help in understanding a universally unexpected reveal. You know that highly anticipated *Tomb Raider* reboot? You know, the game that has been pushing its cinematic, personal experience for over a year? Well it now has multiplayer.

Before you go whipping your bow and green unitard out of the storage cupboard in rage though, hear us out. While Crystal Dynamics has been diligently slogging away at Lara's rebirth, across the seas, a small team at Eidos Montreal has been locked away in a far corner of their office,

“Despite the increased presence of competitive online modes in videogames, nobody asked for it here”

shrouded in secrecy as they developed a whole other portion. No, you're not experiencing another double rainbow; the developer that gave *Deus Ex* new life only two years ago – a stealth-centric first person shooter – are making a third-person multiplayer suite.

It's a rather peculiar move, no doubt, but one that has been set in place in order to keep *Tomb Raider*'s single-player campaign unaffected and focused until its inevitable launch. So sleep easy, your deer hunting shall remain as polished as can be.

With all that in mind, let's break down what we know about it. From what we've seen, matches will consist of four-on-four 'Survivors vs. Scavengers' battle royales amidst various game modes (three that we're aware of), on one of five maps at launch. The first of these will come in the form of your standard Team Deathmatch.

This by-the-numbers mode will see the two groups fight it out in best-of-three matches that rely heavily on environmental traversal, destructible scenery and the utilisation of traps in order to be victorious. Verticality and platforming are concepts that will run throughout all of the modes, as you clamber up ledges, fly down zip-lines or scale up a plethora of rocky walls to quickly and effectively reach your foe, or evade them.

Both teams will be granted two basic loadouts to choose from: Survivors rocking a shotgun/pistol combo or assault rifle/pistol while Scavengers get a little more Bear Grylls with a bow-and-arrow/grenade launcher or rifle/pistol.

While most will naturally gravitate to the herculean option, be warned. Sure, sending devastating arrows through your combatants from the safety of a high vantage point can be insanely gratifying, but if your aim is worse than a four-year old aiming for the potty, your position will be compromised and a torrent of gunfire is bound to follow. You still have your grenade launcher conveniently on hand though, so at least there's that, right?

Given the nature of the *Tomb Raider*'s campaign, it's a little perplexing why a greater emphasis wouldn't be placed on the Robin Hood style of combat to help differentiate from the incredible amount of competitors in the ring. Especially considering the game's underlying goal of conveying what it would be like to live within such a ravenous landscape.

Thankfully then, 'Private Rescue' tries to branch out from the norm with an extra





FACE, MEET AXE

Don't be fooled: your climbing axe might be perfect for gleefully zooming down zip-lines or ascending large environments. Drake would be proud of, but it's also a lean, mean, brain-smashing machine. Yes, once you run out of ammo you can go head-to-head with another player as you trade somewhat awkward lunge animations until one of you manages to land the final blow. Or you can casually sneak up behind some sap, hit \textcircled{A} and perform a brutal stealth kill. Just be prepared to do the dance of death if you fail.

dose of creativity. More grounded in Crystal Dynamics' world, Survivors are forced to scour the map in search of five medical packs and bring them back to a capture point. For the opposition, the task is simple – kill everyone. Each round will end if one of three requirements is met: all five medical packs have been obtained and secured, the Survivors are killed 20 times or once ten gruelling minutes have passed. There's a lot of potential in play here and from what we've seen, matches look to be intense, teamwork-driven battles that anybody can win.

It also presents a greater opportunity to use your traps. A rope trap on the ground, for instance, is the perfect solution to trip up an unsuspecting enemy hot on your tail, allowing you to quickly escape to safety. Alternatively, a sandstorm can be triggered, summoning a level specific event that often impairs the opposing team's vision.

Eidos Montreal claims the third game mode, intriguingly titled 'Cry For Help', will focus on discovery, collection and adventure rather than combat, but have refused to get into specifics just yet. That said, it could very well be the most diverse and interesting mode of the bunch. Or it could be terrible. Who knows!

With nary a detail to go on, it's difficult to speculate.

Speaking of which, there are still four maps and another game mode that remain shrouded in secrecy. Irrespective of what they are, the big question remains: did this game ever need multiplayer in the first place? Despite the increased presence of competitive online modes in videogames, nobody (aside from maybe Eidos corporate) asked for it here. We were quite content with an intense, character-driven title – the reboot for Lara that fans have been begging for. Multiplayer might truly be one of the industry's greatest innovations, but that doesn't mean we're going to stop being cautious on this one.

Allowing Crystal Dynamics to establish *Tomb Raider* for the future is all well and good, but this might not be the best way to do it. At any rate, time shall tell as to whether it all becomes a welcome romp through the wilderness, or proof that it should have stayed shipwrecked.  **Adam Guetti**



SURVIVORS

CHARACTER SELECTION



They Say

Multiplayer that is "Familiar yet different."

We Say

It's certainly not the main reason to buy the game, but it could surprise at launch.

Verdict



God Mode

Go to hell and... die?



For when liposuction just won't cut it, **break out the magic hammer**

God Mode is at odds with its title. When we hear the phrase 'God mode' we picture an experience that's ridiculously easy, to the point of being outright cheaty.

Sort of like a digital version of what it must be like to coast through a life as either Hugh Hefner, or one those Kardashian things. Standing in stark contrast to that, this particular *God Mode* is nothing but wall to wall abuse.

You get kicked in the junk from the get-go. Not only is your character already deader than disco, but they've been thrown into the depths of eternal purgatory (which, incidentally, probably features disco music). Developer Atlus is positioning *God Mode* as an homage to the retro shooters of yesteryear where you and three of your other goddamned friends can link up co-operatively to perforate waves of ancient and mythological enemies.

Call us paranoid, but it's always a

worry when the developer has a bullet list that highlighting the phrase 'simple and straightforward gameplay'. To us that sounds like only some basic intelligence will be required to circle-strafe faster than a Ferrari with its club-lock still on, all the while managing health, armour and ammo supplies. Only time will tell if our instincts are wrong.

Four player co-op is very much the crux of this experience (online, local system link, but no shared TV), with teammates encouraged to communicate and customise their "cadaver's" loadouts to complement one another and ensure the survival of the team. The back-watching and the high-fives go right out the window when your group hits PvP zones at the end of a match. This is where your friends will most eagerly put in the boot for your loot and a chunk of your precious XP.

Another potential game-changer are the Test of Faith modifiers. These are 45 random rules that change from wave to wave in an effort to keep combat fresh, the challenge ever-present and your Rage Meter filled (both on and off screen). Each modifier is there to either make your (un)life extra difficult, to give you a rare reprieve, or to "amuse you through pure novelty and absurdity".

We're calling it now, if Atlus' idea of absurd novelty is the immensely annoying narrator of *God Modes'* latest trailer – who sounds like the *Mortal Kombat* announcer's camp brother, Clovis (seriously, YouTube it) – then we're predicting the fastest 'start game to rage quit' time ever. Otherwise, this could be worth a look.  **Clint McCreadie**

The Pitch

Like a third-person, four-player *Serious Sam*



There's definitely **something odd** about the new groundskeeper

Info

FORMAT:  PS3

GENRE: ACTION

EXPECTED RELEASE: MARCH 2013

DISTRIBUTOR: TBA

DEVELOPER: ATLUS

PLAYERS: 1-4

They Say

"We're introducing an exciting third-person shooter that looks like a retail product, tied together with gameplay features and cooperative play like no other downloadable title has done."

We Say

We love us some co-op. Especially if that co-op enables us to shoot our friends. Paradox be damned.

Verdict

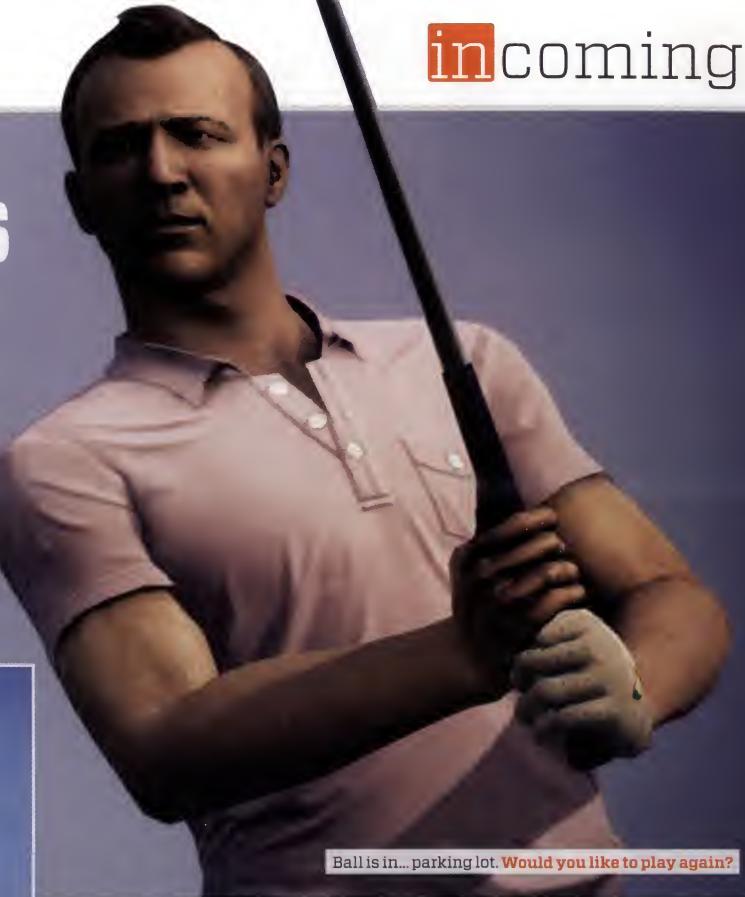


Tiger Woods PGA Tour 14

A slice of history



Tiger swings with the best of 'em



Ball is in... parking lot. **Would you like to play again?**

The Pitch

Golf, now with added old dudes!

Info

FORMAT: PS3
GENRE: SPORT
RELEASE: MARCH 26
DISTRIBUTOR: EA
DEVELOPER: EA TIBURON
PLAYERS: 1-4

As we continue on into the future, *Tiger Woods* looks into the past for success in this year's version. That's not a slur on its plan, as some big-name legends are going to take the spotlight. Sports titles and racers have been doing it for a while, featuring personalities and technology from yesteryear so punters can truly find out who's the best of the best from those olden, golden times and the present.

As well as Tiger, you'll see Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer, Lee Trevino and more as they appeared in their prime, all in a dedicated mode. *Legends of the Majors* covers multiple eras of golfing history, dating back to 1873, and aims to authentically recreate the look and feel of equipment over its dozens of challenges – plus fours are a given. Square off and beat these digital representations with

your own custom character and you'll unlock them for good times elsewhere. Since we weren't born at the turn of the century we're interested to see how the old dudes swung it back then.

It's not just the past that's being serviced, as – finally – the LPGA has been incorporated so you can make your own female pro and take part in the Kraft Nabisco Championship, which according to Wikipedia is one of the four major championships in the LPGA. No word on the Wegmans LPGA Championship, U.S. Women's Open or the Ricoh Women's British Open.

The blokes don't have such concerns, as they'll be able to go for the Grand Slam with all four of the majors (the Masters Tournament, the U.S. Open, the Open Championship and the PGA Championship) for the first time ever in a game. That's a lot of golf, and 20 courses will be present on the disc from the get go. We're not privy to the inevitable DLC schedule, but considering that *Tiger 13* pretty much doubled its courses through extra content we're sure it'll happen here.

As for other improvements, the online Country Club ups its membership from a piddling 25 to a gargantuan 100, and you can also track up to 24 of your fellow golfers swing trails and ball locations at once as you play.

Swing mechanics have also been refined. As golfers have different styles, you'll have to move the left thumbstick at different angles to compensate for that style. A swing meter, similar to the one that was present in *Tiger 09*, will be included.

Couple in night golfing and tweakable weather, and *Tiger 14* is shaping up to be the update you should splash out for.

– **Paul Taylor**



Capital shot, old boy! **Tally-ho, pip pip, etc.**

They Say

"Gives players a chance to travel back through time and relive the rich history of golf by matching up against the sport's greatest legends"

We Say

We always max out our player stats as much as we can – we'll put a dollar on our mutant of a golfer against the legends.

Verdict





The Walking Dead: Survival Instinct

Put your fight or flight reflexes to the test in a post-apocalyptic world overrun by the undead

The Pitch

An engrossing single-player campaign that lets players experience the world of *The Walking Dead* through the eyes of fan-favourite, Daryl Dixon.

Info

FORMAT: PS3
GENRE: ACTION
EXPECTED RELEASE: MARCH 29
DISTRIBUTOR: ACTIVISION
DEVELOPER: TERMINAL REALITY
PLAYERS: 1

By far the greatest feat of AMC's *The Walking Dead* isn't that it's successfully translated a cult ongoing comic series to TV; it's that, in the process of translation and in defiance of comic-book nerds, it birthed the best character across both mediums: Daryl Dixon.

Ex-Boondock Saint Norman Reedus breathes life into one of the main reasons that people keep tuning in week in, week out to see what will happen next. In many ways, he epitomises the core point of difference that *The Walking Dead* IP as a whole has on offer: how would believable human characters behave during a zombie apocalypse?

One of the many things that the show and comic do to try and push the believability of flesh-eating once-humans is to never use the 'z-word'. Instead, zombies are called "Walkers", or anything but that word, which tends to be associated with trashy B-grade films. In an effort to take advantage of the popularity of the AMC's gritty post-apocalyptic show and fan-favourite character Daryl Dixon, Activision has commissioned developer Terminal Reality to create *The Walking Dead: Survival Instinct*.

For those thinking "Call of Duty with zombies", you're way off point; besides, there already is *Call of Duty* with zombies. Go play a Treyarch

CoD, already. Despite the first-person perspective, *Survival Instinct* shares few similarities with the mega-popular *Call of Duty* franchise. In fact, Terminal Reality has gone so far as to describe this game as one that blends first-person action with an emphasis on resource management.

You play as Daryl – voiced by Norman Reedus – in events not long before the start of the show, as he makes his way out of the overrun Georgia countryside towards the assumed safety of Atlanta. By his side is Merle Dixon – voiced by Michael Rooker (who also plays Merle on the show) – Daryl's brother: a troublemaking racist with a penchant for violence. Nice guy he ain't, but a tough, no-nonsense brute of a man who isn't afraid to make difficult decisions is exactly what Doctor Death orders when undead body parts start hitting the fan.

The pitch is that, unlike *Left 4 Dead*, you'll be scared when you see a group of three Walkers, and have to plan your movements accordingly. There's a strong emphasis on avoidance over engagement, with a preference for up-close melee weapons such as knives, a fire axe and a brutal sledgehammer. To further complicate matters, you're going to have herds of flesh-loving foes between you and all-important survival supplies.

Expect to dedicate quite a bit of time to post-apocalyptic shopping in



Could be zombies. Could be crackheads. Either way... *cocks gun*

"Just LOOK at what those bastards did to my car!"



The zombie apocalypse looks a lot like *Surry Hills on a Saturday morning*

Infernal devices

At the foundation of *The Walking Dead: Survival Instinct* is Terminal Velocity's own Infernal Engine. This so-called unified system provides all of the necessary beneath-the-hood tech to create a game in a post-apocalyptic world: rendering, physics, sound, AI and even metrics for measuring how players approach the game. The incorporated VELOCITY Physics Engine is the prize feature, enabling an advanced collision system, dynamic destruction for world objects, believable driving mechanics and lifelike body movement that obeys the limitations of anatomical joint constraints. Expect an emphasis on realism.

Survival Instinct. To separate itself from the likes of *Dead Island*, *Survival Instinct* requires you to weigh up the reward of scoring extra loot at the risk of attracting the attention of Walkers, whose eyes and ears work better than their ability to solve a Rubik's cube. While there is a sprint option to get you away from the ambling cannibals, this comes at the expense of your BO. Yup, Walkers can smell you. Even in this grim apocalyptic future, personal hygiene is a must to avoid being named among the ranks of the undead.

Much like *I Am Alive*, *Survival Instinct* encourages you to explore off the beaten track to find items that will increase the likelihood of your survival. Weapons and ammunition are obvious necessities, but you'll also have to hunt down fuel, food, drinks and assorted medical items, essential in your quest towards Atlanta and the end credits. It's just a shame that the visuals shown to date are, unfortunately, closer to PS2 than PS3 in fidelity; but for now we're willing to put that down to the scope of the locations, and hope that there are at least another few coats of paint yet to be applied before release.

During the course of the campaign you'll be asked to make irreversible decisions about which missions you take. As you explore the world, you'll also encounter a slew of human characters that you can either slay or recruit. Who you choose to kill, leave or take with you also has a dramatic effect on the way the campaign plays out.

In an interesting *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*-like move, you can send members of your group out to complete crucial supply run missions. Before you send them on their merry way, though, you'll want to kit them out with at least a weapon. The catch is that doing so means digging into your inventory.

This raises an obvious question: do you send them out less armed and hope they survive the dangers ahead, or give away a decent weapon while cognisant of the possibility that they may never return? These are some of the difficult decisions that are at the core of *Survival Instinct*'s gameplay experience, and which mirror Telltale's exemplary *Walking Dead* game in a very good way.

Then there's the open road to take into account. When travelling between locations, you'll encounter abandoned cars blocking the way. You can risk jumping out and moving them, at the potential cost of a Walker ambush, or you can hope your fuel survives long enough to take the long way around. Hitchhikers will also want to come along for the ride, but you can't take everyone, or trust everyone for that matter, and on top of that Walkers are everywhere.

It's the emphasis on scavenging and moral dilemmas that has us most interested in the potential of *The Walking Dead: Survival Instinct*. Couple this with two hillbilly brothers that are poised for the kind of redneck rampage that the Walkers won't see coming, and this game is set to please fans and hopefully shambling everyday gamers, too.  **Nathan Lawrence**

They Say

"[A] do-whatever-you-need-to-survive game based on AMC's Emmy award-winning series."

We Say

Ugly visuals tarnish a post-apocalyptic package that's brimming with potential.

Verdict





Mr. Incredible loves riding the one-eyed monster

The Pitch

Skylanders Giants with Disney branding

Disney Infinity

No capes

If *The Simpsons* has taught us nothing else, it's that only one in two million people has what we call the "evil gene". Hitler had it, Walt Disney had it, and whoever thought up that addictive, bane-of-parents-everywhere empire of *Skylanders* had it in spades.

Interestingly, two of those things are merging together to form an even bigger blob of hour-enslaving, collectaholic-creating madness. Ladies and manchildren, say hello to *Disney Infinity*. Bid goodbye to your wallets.

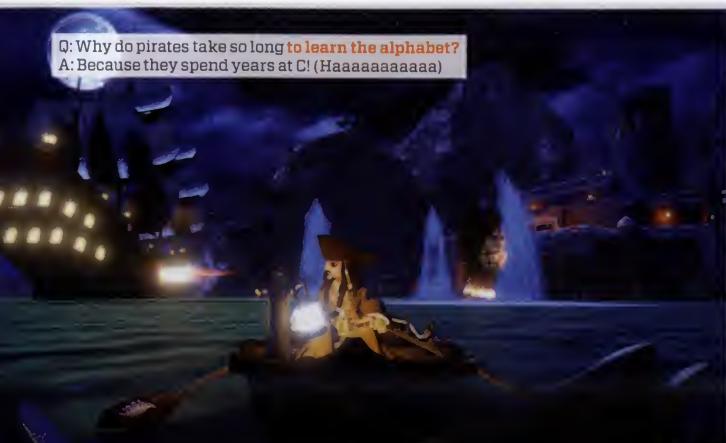
Some savvy genius over at Disney has decided to 'heavily borrow' the *Skylanders* concept of 'figurines that manifest in a game once placed on a portal'... thing. Litigiously speaking their timing for that announcement was perfect. A \$48 million, utterly unlicensed *World of Warcraft* theme park was revealed on the very same day, thus the Eye of Sauron gaze of Activision-Blizzard's lawyers was drawn to China quicker than a teenager's eye to cleavage.

Be that as it may, you've got to appreciate the balls on Disney. Take for example an excerpt from its official fact sheet: "for the first time, players will place real-world interactive figures – characters, power discs and Play Set pieces – on a device called the 'Disney Infinity Base' to activate original, story-driven adventures in the game worlds." First time indeed..

We're having a lend of you, Disney, of course. Despite the obviously similarities between *Skylanders Giants* and *Disney Infinity*, this new series does seem to be evolving the 'portal of power' concept quite a bit further. Talented developer Avalanche Software is handling the 'game' part of this product and their successes with *Toy Story 3: The Videogame*, in particular the kick-arse virtual toybox mode, is not to be underestimated. *Infinity* improves upon that toy box and you can expect to go bombing around a vast open world environment, creating your own stories and customising your adventures by merging characters, environments, gadgets and vehicles.

Better yet, there are no enforced borders stopping characters from different franchises. In your world you can have an eclectic mix of Sulley from *Monsters Inc.* chilling with Mr. Incredible and Jack Sparrow. The initial line-up of figurines will include a whopping 40 characters on day one, and you can bet your soon-to-be-non-existent money a lot more are on the way after that. Buy them all and you may also consider selling your kidneys, or turning to a life of crime, to fund the additional purchases of collectible Play Set pieces and 20 power discs. The latter will enhance your toy box environments, add gadgets to your characters, and prompt loved ones to

Note: sticky hands **sold separately**



Q: Why do pirates take so long to learn the alphabet?
A: Because they spend years at C! (Haaaaaaaaaa)



Look at his eyes: that monster is clearly hepped up on goofballs



Info

FORMAT: PS3
GENRE: ACTION
DISTRIBUTOR: DISNEY
INTERACTIVE
DEVELOPER: AVALANCHE
SOFTWARE
RELEASE: TBA 2013
PLAYERS: 1-4

stage an intervention for you.

All the pieces are in place here, so to speak. But the obvious grey area is the sort of gameplay we can expect. The toy box mode is reportedly a four-player affair, but what form will the two-player 'structured' co-op adventures take? Will they be flimsy pushovers designed to make the kids chortle for a few hours, or will they take the Traveller's Tales route of offering the older gamer enough stimulation to keep coming back for more?

Another mystery is whether or not the various Disney figurines will be categorised into elements, or some other set of powers. The characters in *Skylanders Giants* are divided into eight specific elements (Magic, Earth, Water, Fire, Tech, Undead, Life and Air). Which element you're associated with often determines what you can do in the game, and it also serves to cock-block you from certain areas. The insidious idea being, yes, you can finish the game with one *Skylander*, but you must buy at least seven different figurines to see 100 per cent of the game.

Also, while we're pooh-poohing things, all promotional material up until this point has had a distinct lack

of voice-acting. Don't get us wrong, it was exciting to see personalities from *The Incredibles*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Monsters University*, *Cars*, *Toy Story*, *Wreck-It Ralph*, *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, *Aladdin*, *Frankenweenie* and *The Muppets* mixing it up together. However, an iconic character without their original voice actor is, well, soulless. Don't believe that theory? Try watching one of those Disney Saturday morning spin-offs where Timon and Pumbaa are voiced by some nobodies. It's like having somebody reach inside you, pull out your childhood and repeatedly punch it in the face.

But we digress. *Disney Infinity* still has the raw potential to be what the *Epic Mickey* series should have been: a massive, PG rated, inter-IP orgy of the 'best' Disney characters; not just the shitty, depression era ones that nobody but Warren Spector remembers.

Also, if the rumours are to be believed, Disney's recent acquisition of the *Star Wars* IP could easily come into play here. But, once again, we're basing those hopes on another big 'if': will the new *Star Wars* films be worth caring about? Fact is, only time will tell if the Mickey's being taken out of us, folks.  **Adam Mathew**



"Uh, when I said we should hit the road, I didn't mean it literally..."

They Say

"Disney Infinity combines prominent Disney and Pixar characters and scenarios in a way that mimics how kids play in real life."

We Say

It's hard getting the kids to play outdoors nowadays. The day we read about this we bought stocks in Vitamin D supplements.

Verdict





PlayStation 2



EULOGY:
TOBY MCCASKER

Funeral

FOR A

friend

In early January of 2013, my friend PS2 passed away shortly before his thirteenth birthday. Today we remember him not as he died (in terrible neglect and relative obscurity), but for how he lived: Hard, fast; a jagged line of all-hours frolic that turned my sleeping patterns inside out forever.

“I first met... excuse me. I first met... oh man, sorry. Hrmm-mmm. This is a difficult time for me. A difficult time for everyone, I’m sure, although I can’t speak for you, Microsoft. Yeah I see you. I’m not even sure why I’m up here. Some might say I was paid freelance rates to do it, and yes, I will share my mie goreng with you at the wake. A greater truth is that I first met PS2 in a pawn store. He’d managed to lock himself inside a glass cabinet. I’d been in his position, and we became fast friends. I jimmyed the lock with a fat wad of cash and said he could crash in my lounge room for the rest of his life. He was a patient guy. He’d sit for days on end whispering quietly to himself, waiting for me. Some might say PS2 was the perfect bro even though he aged more rapidly than my other friends; as intermittent

as his light had become and as loudly as he snored those rare nights we weren’t hanging out. He was always there for me. At 4am I would high-five his sharp edges in the dark. He’d whir and beep and we’d buy the ticket and take the ride; have an experience. But it wasn’t just one experience. It was many, and they were varied. He was adventurous, and generous with that adventurous spirit. Everyone wanted to hang with PS2. My friends. The Korean guy who lived with us who was really good at *Tekken 4*. His friends. My ten-year old nephew. My golden retriever, forever clumsy and nosing PS2 into a sudden coma. PS2, bless him, had a bigger than average heart. He was loyal to an easily fixed fault, you know, he never did tell anyone we never got past that last mission in *San Andreas*. This second drink’s for you, friend. Amen.

NOW LET US VIEW A SUCCESSION OF SLIDES DEPICTING HIS LIFE AND TIMES.”

HIS FAVOURITE

Holiday Destinations

PS2 loved to party, and was always showing heaps of different people a good time.



1. Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

17.33 million times visited

"He had a great time out here, getting fat and vomiting and killing the underclass."

2. Gran Turismo 3: A-Spec

14.89 million times visited

"PS2 did like to ride. It was just about his favourite thing."

3. Gran Turismo 4

10.76 million times visited

"Like, really his favourite thing."

4. Grand Theft Auto: Vice City

9.61 million times visited

"Sometimes he got a bit carried away and accelerated hard, wearing neon."

5. Grand Theft Auto III

7.9 million times visited

"Even the measured calm of never talking didn't help. It might've made it worse."

6. Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty

7 million times visited

"Eventually he went through a bit of a dark period and infiltrated a terrorist stronghold."

7. Final Fantasy X

6.6 million times visited

"But he learned to laugh."

8. Final Fantasy XII

5.2 million times visited

"And ride a giant yellow chicken-thing. Riding never left his blood."

9. Kingdom Hearts

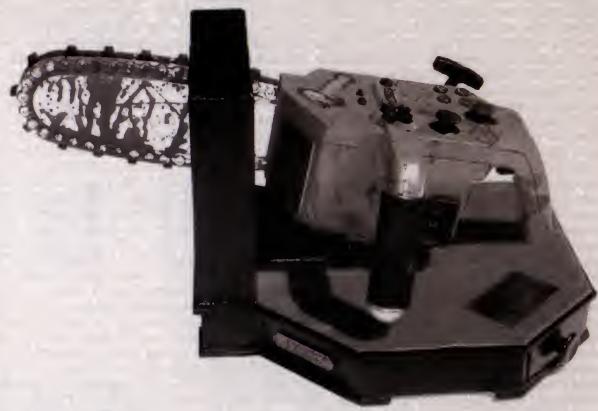
4.78 million times visited

"Except that one time he needed a full-blood transfusion. Where he went then, nobody knows."

10. God of War

4.61 million times visited

"Only that when he awoke with different blood than before, he forever craved more."



HE WAS NOT WITHOUT HIS

Quirks



PS2 was always up into the early AMs buying weird stuff off of the TV.

RESIDENT EVIL 4 CHAINSAW CONTROLLER

"Life is hard and people react in strange ways. This is an immutable fact of life itself, and so I forgave PS2 almost instantly when he took me to a non-specific backwater European burg with the intense purpose of teaching me how to use what could only have been a chainsaw that had recently killed a man. I was uneasy the whole time. The things we did there, I won't recount here. I can't. I have buried them in much the same way as I buried that entire family. I do remember my hands were not chainsaw-shaped enough to work the chainsaw properly, though."

PS2: A LIFE

He outlived his enemies and went through a memorably rebellious phase wherein he dyed his entire body pink. What a guy.



2000

"Born March whenever-th, Japan. He would travel all over the world by November."

2001

"He needed help adapting, and so he MacGyver'd himself a strange contraption he never used. [note: PS2 Network Adapter] GameCube and Xbox were both born this year, in September and November respectively. PS2 didn't think they dressed well."

2003

"In July of this year his congenital blindness was finally solved." [note: EyeToy]

2004

"He lost a lot of puppy fat this year. He could be quite body-conscious." [note: PS2 Slim released]

2005

"In November, 100 million people had hung out with PS2. Never too cool to play with you, though."

2006

"He became a vegan, started listening to Social Distortion, and floriated himself. It was a questionable time." [note: Pink PS2 released]

Lies & slander

..... FOLLOWED HIM

EVERYWHERE



PS2 was a sprightly fellow and could stand on his head. Naturally, outrageous gossip followed him everywhere.

GAMEBIKE

"Because he liked to ride so much, it would be rude but not inaccurate to say that PS2 started to develop a bit of a gut. One day he just couldn't squeeze into his favourite corner of the lounge room and so I got him a GameBike. Now he could ride wherever he wanted in his *Gran Turismo* mobile while peddling frantically, and it was such a sight to behold. However, I often ended up doing it for him. My quads had never been sorer, but the look on his face? Still boxy and dark. But I knew how much he enjoyed it."

THE LINUX KIT

"At some point he'd developed a ribald fascination with the works of William Gibson. He must've read *Neuromancer* five times. In one day. Subsequently I came home after work to find he'd turned himself into some kind of rogue AI. Wires were everywhere, and he demanded that I refer to him only as 'Winternmute.' He'd erased all memory of our good times together. I was really bummed. We got into a one-sided argument. He blinked his red light at me several times, I think. He came to his senses, fittingly, in the winter of 2009."

TRANCE VIBRATOR

"We'd been to Japan together on a boys' weekend Rez holiday. Not our usual, but his adventurous spirit was starting to rub off on me. He came to me one day with this. I appeared worried and he'd told me "Stop freaking out, man" and went off waving it around. It started shaking quite violently and seemed to have no other purpose other than to inspire curious and disapproving looks from passerbys. Its creator, Tetsuya Mizuguchi, claimed it was simply an innocuous holiday additive. He is not a man to be trusted, it seems."

2006

"His much hipper, younger brother was born in November. Initially, they were quite compatible and got along famously. [note: PS3 came out] Some dude called Wii was born in September. PS2 laughed heartily, and never stopped."

2007

"Xbox and GameCube both die quietly in the night. PS2 and I have a party with three other friends."

2009

"Overly conscious of his advancing age, he lowered the price of his company to a mere \$99. In September, his hip young brother PS3 trimmed down and got ripped. They never spoke again." [note: PS3 slim came out, not backwards compatible]

2011

"At the end of March, 153 million people had gone on adventures with PS2. Popular guy. He didn't work a room – he owned it."

2012

"PS2 had fallen gravely ill by this stage, and in September, PS3 became even more trim and jacked. PS2 refused to see him at the door to his deathbed." [note: PS3 even-slimmer released].

2013

"RIP, GOOD BUDDY. SEMPER FI."



SADDAM HUSSEIN KIDNAPPED PS2'S FAMILY TO CONTROL GUIDED MISSILES

"It was around the autumn of 2000 when it was suggested, somewhat spuriously, that then-Iraqi dictator extraordinaire Saddam Hussein had begun stockpiling many of PS2's relatives in a bid to circumnavigate his country's UN-sanctioned arms embargo and create a supercomputer that could guide missile systems. Pure fallacy, it eventuated, though Japan's Ministry Of Trade had limited the PS2 family's comings and goings because of this exact paranoia. One third-world country composed entirely of dust and old hats does not simply jury-rig twenty 128-bit processors with unique software one does not have."

PS2 WAS ACTUALLY THE MATRIX

"You can communicate to a new cyber city. Did you see the movie The Matrix? Same interface. Same concept. Starting next year, you can jack into the Matrix!" claimed PS2's father, an older Japanese man by the name of Ken Kutaragi, one boisterous evening at dinner. Ken made me nervous. He thought I was a bad influence on PS2, always forcing him to eat polycarbonate plastic. I did try to indulge his wild claims at karaoke some nights. I felt him a man of considerable dualism, for while he eyed me disapprovingly here he was recommending with real emphasis that I enter his son's mind and go shopping."

HE WAS GOING TO CHANGE THE WORLD

"We met a startling figure out one night, and he was wild-eyed and had even wilder ideas. Trip, he said his name was, Trip Hawkins. He'd co-founded a company and reared a daughter, name of 3DO. Funny thing she was. You'd never even know she was there sometimes. Trip told PS2, 'You're a mass-market appliance that fundamentally changes society in the same way the printing press did.' Despite Trip's incredible teeth neither of us believed him but nodded in fear, and we left the venue soon after in an awkward miasma, somewhat bewildered."



Pearly Gatecrash

WORDS: ADAM MATHEW

After a whopping five hour, unrestricted hands-on with BioShock Infinite we'd liken the game to its young deuteragonist: mesmerisingly gorgeous and worthy of the deepest affection. Come meet the sequel that holds all the potential of the 'infinite' part of its moniker, an experience that's just as magnetic as its skyhooks...





For the first time ever, we're going to do a multimedia preview. Stop reading this, boot up Side A of the cover disc and watch the video that details the opening four minutes of *BioShock Infinite*.

Take particular note of the two mysterious individuals in the boat and try to keep an ear tuned to their cryptic conversation. The double meanings of the words they choose foreshadow... well, honestly, we *have no freakin' idea*.

BioShock Infinite is a puzzle box we've yet to even find the edges of, let alone unlatch.

Finished watching the vid? Splendid. Welcome back, and let's continue. The chair Booker has sat in is basically a cannon of sorts that fires him skyward in a capsule, and it's a rather violent process if the shit-scared reflections of his face are anything to go by. Right at the worst of it, the neck-yourself smog and thunderclouds peel away to reveal an impossibly beautiful skyscape; a technicolour aero-city bobbing along on a dreamy sea of cumulonimbi.

Our upward thrust fizzles out and is replaced with a cruisey parachute descent into the metropolis. Artistically this is every bit as magical as that very first bathysphere descent down into Rapture. Our capsule lazily, but very deliberately, floats past a colossal statue of Father Comstock (founder and self-proclaimed prophet of Columbia) before sinking into a tunnel that leads us into the craziest immigration line ever.

The pod opens into a sumptuously lit area that is knee deep full of water. Memories of the original *BioShock* abound until we realise this place is deliberately flooded so that our fellow 'pod arrivals', who are bedecked in white religious garb, may be baptised by a blind preacher. Seems Comstock is basically selling the idea that Columbia is the first stop to heaven, the holiest place mankind can exist in until some catastrophic event can be triggered to take us all to the real paradise. We won't spoil what has to happen here, suffice to say we earn the means to enter the streets of Columbia.



Standing in stark contrast to Rapture's dank, broken tunnels, this place is wall to wall eye candy. Vivid colours and bloom lighting bathes the streets and it's also the most 'alive' environment we've ever seen. Leaves play on the wind, the odd hummingbird flits past, and there's the near-constant bobbing and spontaneous reconfiguring of some truly massive buildings buoyed at every range between you and the horizon. Stop-and-smell-the-roses gamers will be on Cloud Nine here as it's almost intimidating how packed full of detail this place is. Shopping districts are overflowing with products, propaganda, advertising and provision barrels to indulge all your thievin' desires (watch your fingers in some places, however). There's also a plethora of people to eavesdrop on, and a wealth of incidental, scripted story-telling moments to entertain and educate the more curious among you.

You'll hunger to be educated, too.

There are so many unanswered questions about how this city could even exist, given the primitive technology of 1912. Who really controls this impossible place and to what end? Why is the trapped Elizabeth known as the lamb? Who is aiding Booker with hand-delivered telegrams that effectively predict his future? How does Comstock know that Booker is coming to save Elizabeth and how does he know to put up warning signs for the citizenry to be on the lookout for a 'false prophet' bearing an 'AD' scar on his hand? Why the hell does Booker have those letters cut into his man-paw anyway?

So many, many questions.

Relax, spoilerphobes. No answers are unravelled for us in our playthrough, but we can immediately tell that this is a game we'll want to immediately replay for a great many reasons. First of all, it'll be nice to go through the game and hear all those funny conversations armed with



★ COMSTOCK ★

Zachary Hale Comstock is the leader of The Founders, the ultra-nationalist party that built the floating city of Columbia. Within Columbia, Comstock is known as a prophet, earning the nickname 'Father Comstock' because he not only has the advantage to predict the future for Columbia, but also predict

THIS SPACE FOR CORRESPONDENCE

any attacks from his enemies, including the actions of Booker DeWitt. Comstock was once married, until sometime before Friday, February 13, 1903. His wife, the enigmatic 'Lady Comstock' birthed his child after a curiously short one week gestation period and was killed by one Daisy Fitzroy.

THIS SPACE FOR ADDRESS ONLY

some context. Secondly, we'll want to see how this story branches based upon its obviously signposted decision points. We were subjected to a few, most of them offered by a creepy man and woman duo who appear in the randomest of places. They seem to be one step ahead of Booker and following his progress like two competing punters tracking a bet. We couldn't swear on it, but we think they're the twosome from the boat.

Speaking of doing things over, there were times when we were forced to do just that on the battlefield (read: rookie deaths in a fire fight). Get capped and you'll not just hop out of a Rapture-esque vita chamber – you'll re-enter the world from a strange, black and white, purgatory



version of what appears to be Booker DeWitt's Private Investigator office. It's an odd, as yet unexplained phenomenon that robs you of cash and replenishes the health of any enemy still standing. Expect to do a lot of it, even on Medium a fight in *BioShock Infinite* is fast and fierce.

All of your vigors (read: plasmids) can be switched through via a tap of **L2** and can be either a quick shot with an **L1** tap, or a holding of the same button will create a proximity trap version of that power. The other half of your dual-wield is an array of the usual suspect guns: pistols, repeating machine guns, shotguns and a sniper rifle. Enemies seemed quite vocal and were intelligent

flankers, plus there are pesky teleporter types and suicide bombers that'll keep you on your toes.

Interesting switch-ups to the usual formula include a sprint function on **L3**, a somewhat awkward iron-sight function on **R3**, and a melee function on **A** (tap to whack, hold to execute). The latter is surprisingly brutal as the skyhook can be sunk into foreheads; it also slices open throats and decapitates in a jiffy, too. Speaking of confronting scenes when Booker acquires his vigors (e.g. the fire ability burns his flesh right down to the bones) and when you immolate or peckstorm somebody with a murder of crows the end results will not please the ➤

POSTAGE DUE 50¢

★ DAISY FITZROY ★

Comstock's nemesis and leader of the anarchist group the Vox Populi. Daisy wants to destroy The Founders and their sympathisers. She is very much aware of Elizabeth and her powers, and wishes to harness them for the betterment of her agenda. She appears on propaganda posters throughout the city, and recordings of her messages are frequently projected onto large crimson sheets with speakers booming her voice across the surrounding area, in an attempt to vandalise the Founders' displays and property as well as rally support.

THIS SPACE MAY BE USED FOR MESSAGE





★ GOING OFF, THE RAILS ★

As our demo progresses we gain access to the skyhook, a magnetised doodad that is strapped to Booker's left hand. Initially it can be used to leapfrog between static 'hook points' dotted around the world and highlighted with a helpful green lightbulb. Once attached you're then offered a contextual 'this is where you'll land if you tap X' indicator. Place that over an enemy and you'll slingshot into them and knock their unfortunate arse for six.

The skyhook gets even cooler when you use it on the rollercoaster style skylines crisscrossing Columbia. To begin with it's a struggle to keep yourself facing the right way, especially if you've panned your head about to take potshots at enemies on the 'ground' (or towards other 'skyhookers' chasing you). Interestingly, it's not as on-rails as you'd imagine. Booker can be made to leap between skyline tracks with X and you can reverse your momentum whenever you wish.

squeamish. Sissies rejoice, however, as gore can be toned down in the options, as can the new battle damage indicators which make your targets spew out coloured numbers ala *Borderlands 2*.

Getting back to the idea of Columbia as a city, we've got to be honest with you: going in we weren't enthusiastic about the setting. A 1940s city under the waves built by nothing but "grit, spit and a whole bunch of superpowered people who discovered a DNA-rewriting sea slug" did require some suspension of disbelief. The idea of an impossibly heavy and much more vast city – complete with robo-horse drawn carts, skyhook transit system, terminator George Washingtons and superpowers gifted by what appears to be old-timey lemonade – running off 1890s technology? Yeah, that's pushing things to laughably impossible. Be that as it may, the absurdity of Columbia lessened for us the more we were allowed to peek into the clues tucked down its streets and boardwalks.

For starters, for every 1912 porno moustache, jaunty cap and

“THE SKYHOOK CAN BE SUNK INTO FOREHEADS, IT ALSO OPENS THROATS AND DECAPITATES IN A JIFFY.”



embarrassingly quaint advertisement, you'll catch the influence of some sort of temporal weirdness. Strolling along a man-made beach in the sky, we chuckle at the stupid, stripy full-bodied 'swimming' costumes of the era as an organ grinder pumps out some music. And then we stop in our tracks and really listen to it. The barely recognisable, tempo-shifted tune, he's playing: Cyndi Lauper's 1983 hit *Girls Just Wanna Have Fun*. What the fu-

Later still, when we first bear witness to Elizabeth creating a phenomenon known as 'tearing', we (think) we can see how Columbia is possible. Upon reaching Elizabeth's epic tower prison in the centre of Comstock's wacky sky-land, we discover that she's not so much a prisoner, but a closely studied specimen. She's completely oblivious to the fact that her stately quarters are a system of one-way mirrors, and her talents and hobbies (such as code breaking and painting) are meticulously documented in small movie theatres dotted about the facility. This eerily deserted place is stuccoed with warnings, and thanks to

some discarded voxophone recordings (audiologs), we're told in no uncertain terms that Elizabeth's custodians were utterly shit-scared of her.

Voyeuristically watching Elizabeth go about her day, we see her hug a book about Paris and stare off into the distance wistfully. She then turns to a recently painted picture of the Eiffel tower and casually rends open reality (whether it's time travel, or a bridge to a parallel universe is uncertain) and creates a portal to French-ville.

It's a jaw-dropping moment. The neon lit street of 'other-Paris' is in full swing as a local cafe pumps out the 1985 Tears For Fears hit *Everybody Wants to Rule The World*. Elizabeth's blissful reverie is broken when she's forced to patch the rift to avoid an incoming ambulance. A bit later on, once Booker makes his introductions, Elizabeth explains that these 'tears' cannot be manifested just anywhere, and though what destination she gets can be dangerous and unpredictable, there's definitely an element of 'wish-fulfilment' to it. The

“[LIZ'S] NOT SO MUCH A PRISONER, BUT A CLOSELY STUDIED SPECIMEN.”





possibilities of Irrational's universe then open up to us. Elizabeth may well be being used as an acquirer of advanced technology from an unlimited number of alternate universes.

Thankfully her unique ability isn't just tied to scripted moments; we get a brief taste of how her summoning skills can be used to aid Booker when the chips are down. In one firefight she manifests a black and white 'preview projection' of sorts that lets us materialise, on the fly, more cover, elevated skyhook positions, or an automated gun turret.

It also has to be said that while the delicate Elizabeth can't be counted on to shoot enemies in a scrap, she's quite the supportive partner. Amid the cat-calls and tactical commands shouted by your enemies, you'll hear Elizabeth yell out her discoveries of ammo, Salt (fuel for your vigors) and even a new weapon or two. It's then only a matter of tapping @ at the prompt to have her huck it over into your waiting hands.

Outside of combat, Elizabeth, or 'Liz' as she's affectionately called by the folks

at Irrational, is the most fascinating AI construct we've ever shared a space with. Her facial animation and traversal animations are sublimely smooth, to the point where you never see any telltale 'keyframe' hitch when the code tells her it's time to do something else. It sounds odd on paper, but she's the first AI companion that we didn't want to rush or outright ignore. She keeps pace when you're not interested in tarrying, but if you take the time to stroll you'll be treated to something truly magical as the starry-eyed Elizabeth flits excitedly to anything of interest.

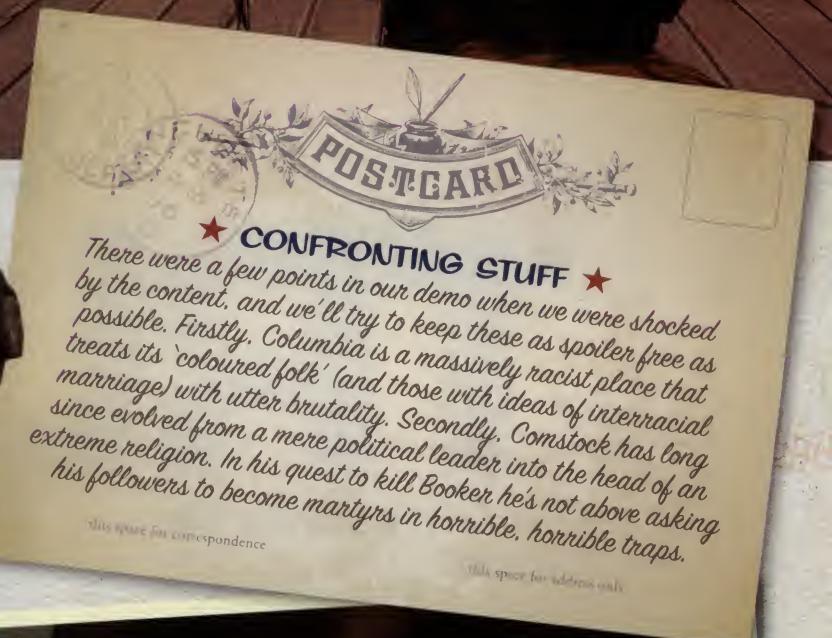
Which, at the end of the day, is what excites us most about *BioShock Infinite*. Not only has it retained the "thinking-man's shooter" approach of the original, but thanks to the endearing Elizabeth, Irrational is crafting a shooter with brains plus a heart and soul. And how many games in the genre can attest to that?

BioShock Infinite releases soon, but if we could tear space-time to get our hands on it now-now, we would do so in an instant. Damn your continuum. ♣



POLICE
DO NOT C

"[IT'S] A SHOOTER
WITH BRAINS, PLUS A
HEART AND SOUL"



IN DOG WE TRUST



The kennel of **Naughty Dog** has unleashed some of the most beloved experiences seen on a Sony. Some of you know the team as a PlayStation mainstay since the very beginning, others see them as the jewel in the PS3's first-party developer crown. Step into our time machine and meet them as they once were: basement pirates who bet big on Sonic's ass.

KEEF THE THIEF



Jason Rubin grows up in Washington DC as a software pirate with a love for games. "I saw my first videogame, *Pong*, when I was about seven years old and it was love at first sight.

"At age 13 I got my first computer and I kinda took to it naturally. I started playing games on it, buying games for it, trading games and, well, slowly hacking other people's games. I was a massive pirate." Slowly but surely, Rubin got better at hacking, moving up from cheekily slapping his name on the front of other people's works to changing the games themselves, and then eventually moving on to write his own primitive stuff.

In 1982 a shared interest develops between Rubin and a partner in crime called Andy Gavin. "Jason and I met at school when we were twelve and we loved talking computers and swapping games," explains Gavin. "We both had Apple IIs, we taught each other C++ and learned together, bit by bit. We did, however, have diametrically opposed personalities. I was much more well behaved".

The pair have little interest in what is being taught at their school and so they divide their class time between stoking over games and, well, being naughty. One legendary story includes Rubin being locked in a school closet for misbehaving. He took the time-out as an opportunity to climb into the ceiling via the air ducts and rejoin the class by falling through the roof (after trying to spit on the teacher). Sounds like a classic vent section to us; clearly this was a future game designer in the making.

In 1985 the 15 year olds Rubin and Gavin form Jam Software (an acronym for Jason and Andy's Magic and something that Rubin today calls "a f-king wretched name"). They create their first fledgling game called *Math Jam*, an educational romp that the two young entrepreneurs unsuccessfully try to sell to their school. A year later one of Rubin's real-life misadventures, which earned him a banning from a local snow field, becomes

RINGS OF POWER Boobies easter egg

Holding down-right, Start and A+B+C while switching on the game turns the (shitty) Naughty Dog logo into a topless chick. Tame by today's standards, this blew minds back in the pre-internet porn, 16-bit era.



the inspiration for their next project, *Ski Crazed* (originally titled *Ski Stud*). It's here that the two hackers recognise their particular strengths: problem solver Gavin is more adept with programming, Rubin has a gift for visuals. *Ski Crazed* is sold for \$250 to a small publisher called Baudeville and sees minor success.

A much needed change to the company name is made in 1987 and Naughty Dog is officially born. This is also the year that high school graduation separates the two friends; Rubin ships out to college in Michigan and Andy plots a course for Philadelphia. Despite a distance of 1200 kilometres, and no Internet connection, the programmer and the artist continue to make games like 1988's *Dream Zone*, an utterly surreal, graphical text adventure that, today, makes us question what they were smoking in their respective dorms. Its success is modest but it bolsters the Naughty Dog portfolio enough to secure a \$15K, 10%, three game deal with publisher Electronic Arts.

An Amiga RPG entitled *Keef The Thief* is completed for EA in 1989 and two years later is followed by *Rings of Power* for the Mega Drive, another RPG and the first videogame ever to have a secret nude code.

College ends for Gavin and Rubin and the Naughty Dog kennel is boarded up for a time. Gavin heads off to MIT to get a degree in Artificial Intelligence and Computer Science. Rubin moves to California to learn how to surf. Once he achieves this he enters the special effects industry.

A call in 1992 from EA founder Trip Hawkins, mastermind of Panasonic's new 3DO console, serves as the lure to hook Naughty Dog back into the games industry. *Way of the Warrior*, a digitised 2D fighter that's basically a poor man's *Mortal Kombat*, is born. Despite having stiff controls, horrendous animation and starring Rubin and a bunch of his mates doing some bad martial arts cosplay (including Andy Gavin's brother, Mitch, who plays the drunken Aussie fighter Shaky Jake), *WotW* proves to be one of the most popular titles on this ill-fated system.

It's also a good enough title to land Naughty Dog a publishing deal with Universal Interactive Studios. Gavin and Rubin get more funds than ever before and some office space on their studio backlot. Initially the idea of being a part of a huge entertainment machine is exciting, but as time goes on cracks begin to show.

"It was a really funny culture there [at Universal Interactive]," recalls Gavin. "Almost nobody there knew a thing about videogames." Being left to their own devices by a publisher that doesn't understand the medium sets Naughty Dog on a course to crash. Big time... ▶



CRASH COURSE



Crash Bandicoot was thought up during an epic cross country road trip. While Gavin and Rubin were relocating from Boston to LA in 1994 their conversation turned, from 'I spy with my little eye' to three things: the lucrative possibilities of making their own character action game, the impending 3D gaming revolution, and, surprisingly, Sonic the Hedgehog's rear.

"What we asked ourselves is 'how do you move a 2D game like *Sonic* into 3D?" says Rubin. "What we realised was that the simplest conceptual way to do it was to take a side-scrolling 2D world and turn it 90 degrees so that you were no longer going from left to right, rather in and out of the screen. We decided, then and there, that the concept would be called: *The Sonic's Ass game*".

The fledgling Naughty Dog team decide that *Sonic's Ass* will use a classic Warner Bros. cartoon style

morphed into 3D. The team then comes up with the idea of putting the game 'camera' on a dolly, much like Rubin had seen done in special effects movie scenes. In doing so they could provide a decent, constant vantage point of the action. Also, its fixed nature would allow the engine to draw a lot more polygons on screen and create dense jungle environments that could give *Sonic's Ass* a visual edge over the competition.

"We decided, then and there, that the concept would be called: *The Sonic's Ass game*"

The new head of Universal Interactive and future industry legend, Mark Cerny, loves the idea but, understandably, requests a more marketable, less copyright infringing protagonist. Enter: Universal's suits.

"We knew that we wanted to do an animal character, but the marketing department had some... very... interesting ideas," says Rubin through clenched teeth. "Wuzzles the Wombat was one. That became Willy the Wombat." Thankfully, somebody has a big book of Australian marsupials that provides the answer. Gavin and Rubin flick to 'B' for 'Bandicoot' and both sides of the table love the cuteness-factor, not to mention the name.

Crash Bandicoot is coded into beta form, and in a time when nobody is really attempting a 3D action platformer with a free-roaming camera, it turns a lot of heads. What's more impressive is that the game is made by Gavin, Rubin and five other guys – three of which you can still find at Naughty Dog today. "What our tiny little team attempted back then was technically more complex than what we were doing half a decade later with *Jak & Daxter* and the benefit of twice as many programmers."



Crash Bandicoot
is dedicated to the
late Tae Min Kim,
a Naughty Dogger
who starred as
The Dragon in *Way
of the Warrior*





says Gavin. "We had this extremely complex algorithm to compress the level so that we could run 12 to 15 megabytes of data through the two megabyte PlayStation." After many, many chaotic all-nighters Crash Bandicoot achieves final form and it's of a quality to earn Naughty Dog a date with destiny.

At E3 in 1996 Crash's unveiling catches the attention of Sony Computer Entertainment who has just released the PlayStation a year before. "Sony never wanted and never created a mascot for the PlayStation," says Rubin. "But when Crash launched it became the defining action game for the console, and that's hard to ignore."

Sony Japan approaches Naughty Dog with a view to publishing *Crash Bandicoot* in the land of the rising sun – providing some changes are made to what they perceive as a character that's been built by westerners

"Some senior execs from Sony Japan wanted to talk about their reservations with [Crash] ... it was a very, very scary meeting."

for westerners. "Some senior execs from Sony Japan wanted to talk about their reservations with [Crash Bandicoot]," recalls Rubin. "It was a very, very scary meeting". After a few odd tweaks to the character [See: Mascot Makeover], Sony agrees to publish *Crash Bandicoot* in Japan and it becomes the first US-made game to break a million units sold.

The rest, as they say, is history. Riding high from the success of this original Crash blueprint Naughty Dog continues to expand as a company and releases *Crash 2*

ANDY GAVIN ON THE STATE OF CRASH and NDI today

"Crash is a little like the really hot girlfriend that you dumped because of an important-at-the-time argument. Then, years later when you run into her, find she's a hooker with a crack problem'... 'Naughty Dog on the other hand is the kid that grew up, got straight A's at Harvard, then founded an internet company and made a fortune. Plus they still come home for the holidays and send Mom flowers on Valentine's day."

MASCOT MAKE OVER

This is what Sony Japan wanted changed. Crash lost his green eyes (rare in Asian culture) and his psychotic grin.



in 1997, *Crash 3 Warped* in 1998 and in 1999 the greatly enlarged team even tries its hand at a kart racer called *Crash Team Racing*. Interestingly, these last two Crash games mark the debut of Crystal Dynamics expat Evan Wells, future (and current) co-president of Naughty Dog.

The Crash franchise has soon sold over 22 million copies worldwide, is now synonymous with the PlayStation brand, and has earned Naughty Dog a rabid fan base. It's at this point that Gavin and Rubin decide to sever the tie between Naughty Dog and the still relatively clueless Universal. The idea is to pursue a better developer / publisher relationship with Sony, but in order to do it they must give up custodianship of the *Crash Bandicoot* franchise. "I thank my lucky stars to this day that we made the decision, as hard as it was, to walk away," says Rubin in retrospect.

Free to craft their own IP as they see fit, and perfectly positioned to get on the ground floor with the forthcoming PlayStation 2 console, Gavin and Rubin, quite fittingly, base their very next IP on a dynamic duo...





YOU DON'T
KNOW JAK



Naughty Dog, the chart-topping developer founded by two basement hackers, is bought out for untold millions and becomes a subsidiary of Sony Computer Entertainment. "It just really made sense for us to focus on the development aspect," says Gavin. "[With the Sony deal] we didn't want to worry about picking the best publisher for our next game and trying to haggle out the best deal."

In 2000 *Jak & Daxter: The Precursor Legacy* is released to an eager public. The humanoid half of this new franchise, Jak, is a strong silent type and proves to be an instant hit with fans who have followed Naughty Dog over from the *Crash Bandicoot* series. His side-kick, Daxter the ottsel, is less well received thanks to his misfiring comic relief and loud-mouth demeanour.



"Daxter the ottsel is less well received thanks to his misfiring comic relief and loud-mouth demeanour"

Fans are undivided about the impressive size and scope of this new world. "What we wanted to create with *Jak & Daxter* was a game that felt like a single, continuous, giant playground that you could go around and do everything" says Rubin.

The Precursor Legacy quickly becomes the benchmark for which all action platformers are judged, the vanguard of a golden age of collect-a-thons on the PS2. The game shows off technology that nobody at the time can hope to match, and so Naughty Dog decides to license the core graphics sections of said engine to fellow Sony developer Insomniac Games, thereby having a hand in the birth of the *Ratchet & Clank* series. As the years roll on Insomniac returns the favour by giving technology back and a bond is formed.

"We had [and still have] a close relationship with Insomniac Games" says Gavin. "They were actually right next to us in the lot, back in the Universal days."

Having wowed early PS2 adopters and helped place a sister studio on their own path to glory, Naughty Dog turns its attentions to *Jak II*, a sequel that is a notable departure from the formula. By 2001 Rockstar Games has released *Grand Theft Auto III* on the PS2 and the influence it's had on *Jak II* is obvious. Jak and Daxter's world and inhabitants become noticeably darker, plus there are now beefier guns and (hover)carjacking is rife. Also, Jak is no longer mute, which is perhaps an effort to better differentiate him from *GTA III*'s speechless protagonist, Claude Speed.

With 2003's *Jak II* comes the Naughty Dog engine



Left: Oddly, Jak X had a soundtrack that included Faith No More and A Perfect Circle.

2.0, a revamped beast that enables Naughty Dog's 30 - 40 person team to create richer, more enormous worlds. This is also the game that marks both a momentous arrival and a sad goodbye. *Jak II* is the very first Naughty Dog project of future (and current) co-president Christophe Balestra, but its credits also bear a dedication to Jason Rubin's black labrador, Morgan, the original office naughty dog who inspired the brand name.

The bitter-sweet news keeps on coming. The third *Jak* releases a year later and becomes another success story that marks the first appearances of Amy Hennig (future Director of the *Uncharted* series) and Neil Druckmann (future Creative Director of *The Last of Us*). It's also the last project of co-founders Gavin and Rubin.

"Our contracts were up," explains Gavin. "To stay (on terms we wanted) we would have had to haggle out a new one. Personally, I was burnt-out after over ten years of 90-110 hour working weeks. And more importantly, we'd been training our top two guys to run full game teams. They were ready".

The split from Sony is an amicable one and the torch is passed to Balestra and Wells who hold true to Naughty Dog tradition by wrapping up a trilogy with a racer, 2005's *Jak X*. All told the *Jak & Daxter* franchise rakes in 12 million dollars and is an unmitigated success. ▶

"Personally, I was burnt-out after over ten years of 90-110 hour working weeks."



ICE, ICE BABY

By the time *Jak X* is on shelves, and the approaching PS3 is looming large on the horizon, Naughty Dog starts its own internal team called ICE Team. In the fullness of time it will become Sony's 'World Wide Studios central technology group'. Its specialised group of code-monkeys focus purely on creating core graphics technologies for Sony's worldwide first-party published titles, including low-level game engine components, graphics processing pipelines, supporting tools, and graphics profiling and debugging tools.

Interestingly, it's not just the first-party Sony devs that get the benefit from ICE's R&D. As new co-president Evan Wells puts it: [Once Naughty Dog] repackages all those routines into the [widely shared] Edge libraries, they then get distributed to third-party [developers]. So pretty much anybody developing on the PlayStation 3 is using code [produced by] a separate development team." In layman's terms: there's a Naughty Dog pawprint in the code of every first-party game.



UNCHARTED TERRITORY



Above: Naughty Dog's ICE Team do really good ice. Makes sense, really.

YOU CAN'T FAKE THE DRAKE

Ubiquitous voice actor Nolan North plays Nathan Drake and it eventually becomes his signature role. Interestingly, North was very close to becoming Wayne Allwine's successor as the voice of Mickey Mouse until Disney decided to choose someone with a less hectic schedule.

When we set out to make our "next-gen" title for the PS3 we really wanted to do something special, something nobody had ever seen before", says Wells. "We looked at what was out there, the landscape of games being developed, and everything had this sort of dark, grey and brown look. We wanted to go the complete opposite of that. The type of game that would draw a person in if they walked past it and caught a glimpse from the corner of their eye."

Though they have a long history of cartoony franchises, Naughty Dog's lack of experience with true photo-realism doesn't seem to slow the team down one iota. "We wanted to deliver plants moving, real-time light, water that refracts light correctly and soaks the player," adds Balestra. "All of the details you see in real-life is what we wanted to reproduce in *Uncharted*'s lush organic feel. We wanted to get the player away from constricting corridor shooting and out into this intoxicating tropical jungle where you could just taste the moisture in the air."

Water tech becomes a primary focus for Naughty Dog in *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* and the ultra-realistic results become just as memorable as the game's protagonist, Jason Rubin lookalike Nathan Drake. Historical relevance is big on the team's list, which is why this new hero is given ties (however dubious) to legendary explorer Sir Francis Drake. Nathan's swashbuckling, smart-ass swagger resonates with gamers as does the

[*Uncharted's* water tech] becomes just as memorable as the game's protagonist, Jason Rubin lookalike Nathan Drake."

gameplay built around him: classic Naughty Dog traversal, intense gunplay and some good old fashioned fisticuffs.

"While creating this new franchise we embraced the action-adventure genre in its classic form, but in a contemporary context," explains Creative Director, Amy Hennig. "We looked at what a lot of the old matinee serials of the 1930s delivered – heaps of chases, treasure hunting, unlikely allegiances with a whole crazy cast-load of characters, narrow escapes and risky situations – then we reinvented all that for the 21st century."

2007's *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* becomes a stand-





**Above: nods to
The Last Crusade
abound in Drake's
Deception**

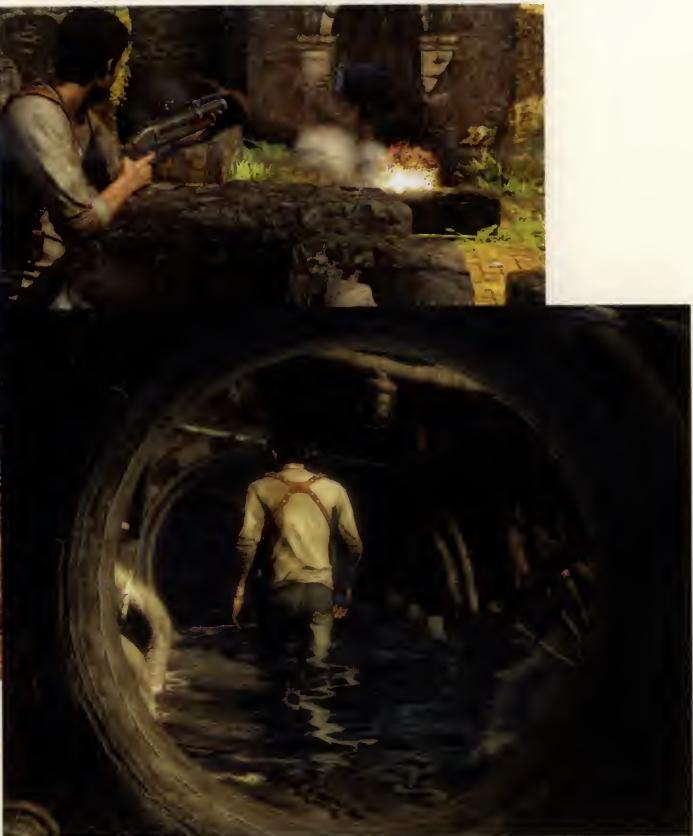


out hit for the PS3. It's well received by critics, many of whom cite its impressive technical achievements and high production values that are similar to that of a summer blockbuster film. The game goes on to sell more than one million copies in ten weeks, and when *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* is announced fans are eager to return to Drake's derring-do deeds of action and adventure.

Naughty Dog doesn't disappoint. In the development time after *Drake's Fortune* release, Naughty Dog finds a way to maximise the utilisation of the Cell's SPUs (Synergistic Processing Units). Their estimates for utilisation in *Drake's Fortune* is only around 30% used. *Among Thieves* is made to use upwards of 90% of the Cell processor and eats up all 25GB of a single Blu-ray Disc. True to its name, Naughty Dog's ICE team also turns its considerable talents toward the replication of truly sublime snow effects.

Among Thieves combines its unprecedented visual fidelity with all-new multiplayer options, not to mention one of the most memorable and well-scripted single-player campaigns of all time. Game of the Year awards follow and Metacritic ends up naming it as the most critically acclaimed game of 2009 with an amazing 96/100 average after 105 reviews.

"the original *Uncharted* [uses] only around 30% [of the Cell's SPUs]. *Uncharted 2* is made to use upwards of 90%"



Naughty Dog then starts the unenviable task of trying to beat their best with a third outing that will eventually become 2011's *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception*. The team immediately begins to trawl through the stellar reviews of *Among Thieves*, hoping to find negative feedback with which to improve the formula. It's not an easy task, and the weight of public expectation on this sequel is most definitely felt.

"Making *Uncharted 3* involved a lot of pressure," recalls Hennig, "a crushing amount if we're being honest. Some of it was self imposed and other parts naturally imposed by the circumstances of having a big fan base out there, hungering for any scrap of information. I'll tell you, there's something to be said for being under the radar and being the dark horse."

Drake's Deception enjoys the benefits of Naughty Dog's new and improved motion-capture facility and uses an "evolved" version of the Naughty Dog 2.0 engine. Particularly drool-worthy innovations include sand, fire, smoke, and ocean effects, plus co-president Balestra says the sequel is "running at full [100%] speed on code written specifically for the SPUs". *Drake's Deception* doesn't manage the same graphical advance seen between the first two games because the PS3 is already close to its outer limits. *Uncharted 2 to 3* is still a jump, technically – just a narrower one.

When the game releases it meets expectations but, arguably, doesn't quite best the previous benchmark set by *Among Thieves*. Regardless, this third outing wins several Game of the Year awards and ships a whopping 3.8 million copies worldwide on launch day.

THE LAST THING EXPECTED



In 2011 Naughty Dog surprises fans by publicly revealing that, for the first time in the company's history, a second internal team has been formed to allow two titles to be developed simultaneously. The split occurs sometime after the launch of *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves*, allowing a non-*Uncharted 3* team to secretly toil away for two years on Naughty Dog's next big trick: *The Last of Us*.

Co-directed by company veterans Neil Druckmann and Bruce Straley, *The Last of Us* features a tone and setting that's about as far removed from the *Crash* years as you can get. It dumps players in a post-apocalyptic America that's been ravaged for two decades by a lethal cordyceps-type fungal virus. In one of the few remaining, military-controlled quarantine zones players meet Joel, a morally bankrupt black-marketeer who has been shanghaied into smuggling a young girl, Ellie, from the harsh regime. Once free these two characters begin a perilous journey through the USA with major stops in Boston, Massachusetts, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Put in control of Joel, players are tasked with avoiding both the Infected creatures whose sole aim is the spreading of the fungal infection, and human scavengers that survive outside the quarantine zones and prey on wayward travellers. Adding to the twosome's problems are the fact that the military is determined to reacquire them, and the revelation that the pandemic is broader than originally thought. To quote Druckmann: "a great mystery about [*The Last of Us*] that no one knows is: there is actually more than one kind of infection."

In terms of gameplay, Naughty Dog aims to divert from the *Uncharted* formula by being "less linear", though



"for the first time in the company's history, a second internal team is formed to allow two titles to be developed simultaneously."

The Last of Us cannot be classified as open-world. Exploration in particular is given greater importance and more gameplay weight than Nathan Drake's simple relic collection. Items found by Joel and Ellie can further their survival, help them combat enemies, replenish their health, or increase their ability to store even more things. These items include ammunition, batteries, binding, alcohol, blades, sugar, explosives, and canisters. Along with a simple crafting mechanic, players must compete with enemies who scavenge precious materials in the same environment in real-time.

Players unwilling to share, or engage in some stealth, can fall back on *The Last of Us*' very realistic and strategic combat. Unlike the *Uncharted* series, ammunition is painfully scarce, the lethality of weapons is very high, and endlessly regenerating health has been replaced with medkits.

Similarly, *Uncharted*'s M rated, relatively bloodless violence has given way to Naughty Dog's most goriest outing to date. The infected are grotesque horrors that can be shredded to bits by Joel's various traps, but perhaps the most confronting scenes are reserved for the intimate executions the player must make on fellow survivors, some of which beg for their lives.

Naughty Dog stresses a desire for realism and

NAUGHTY DOG ON THE LAST OF US MULTIPLAYER

"We don't approach [multiplayer] in any of our games as tacked on," says NDI Community Strategist Arne Meyer. "We have separate teams working on the different components so that we can maintain full focus on making [single-player] and [multiplayer] up to our standards."





"A great mystery about [The Last of Us] that no one knows is: there is actually more than one kind of infection"



Left: Old dogs and new (from L to R): Christophe Balestra, Andy Gavin, Jason Rubin, Evan Wells

WHY YOU DO NOT MESS WITH TESS

Tess is voiced and played by Annie Wersching. You might recognise Annie's voice from her work on the hit TV series *24* as Agent Renee Walker. She spent 14 years with the St. Louis Celtic stepdancers and spent her youth competing in Irish dance. Sounds like a Riverdance easter egg waiting to happen.

believability in this new project, investing a great deal of time into the game's AI systems. Unlike the single-minded cannon-fodder in the *Uncharted* series, the enemies here show emotion and vulnerability by getting angry when friends die, and fearful when they lose the upper-hand. This structured AI system is a dynamic, adaptable blueprint also referred to by Druckmann as the "Balance of Power", in which the overall scenario and the advantages that come with it change depending on which opposing group is currently the stronger, better-equipped side.

Ellie is the player's near-constant companion, but in the countdown to launch day Naughty Dog reveals another pivotal character in Joel's cross-country adventure. Tess is a hardened survivor living in one of the last remaining quarantine zones and has the guts to operate a black market in a city under martial law. As a long-time partner of Joel, the two have become known within the criminal underworld for their ruthlessness. Street smart and confident, Tess is a savvy strategist and

negotiator. Her ability to generate intelligent plans to secure the contraband for their trade is second to none.

Tess and Joel subscribe to the same dog-eat-dog philosophy. They survive by being able to do what others can't or won't. Her trust and loyalty in Joel runs deep. However, secretly, she questions whether Joel shares the same emotions that she feels for him.

With the characters and setting teased, the gaming community in 2013 is now salivating for any bit of info. Critics agree that *The Last of Us* is well placed to deliver the sort of mature, character-driven experience that has become the hallmark of Naughty Dog.

Looking back it's been a long 25 years for Naughty Dog, growing from the largely-forgotten *Dream Zone* to the potentially genre-defining *The Last of Us*. Speaking personally, over the years we've felt as though the studio has almost grown up alongside us. It shrugged off the kiddy, cutesy looks of *Crash*, had its angsty and experimental phase with *Jak & Daxter*, and finally wound up on the mature route of the *Uncharted* series, which lead to the world-weary cynicism of *The Last of Us*.

However, one thing that has remained constant after a quarter of a century: the quality of Naughty Dog's games, and its dedication to pushing the medium forward, has never once dipped below the level of 'exemplary'. Andy Gavin says that the corporate culture and ethos he and Rubin instilled in Naughty Dog was "put the player first" and "provide good value to the player". His definition of value: "wow factor, fun, novelty, and a polished entertainment experience that minimises frustration".

With *The Last of Us* lurking large just around the corner, those lofty ideals look like they're set to continue. Here's to another 25 years of Naughty Dog. 



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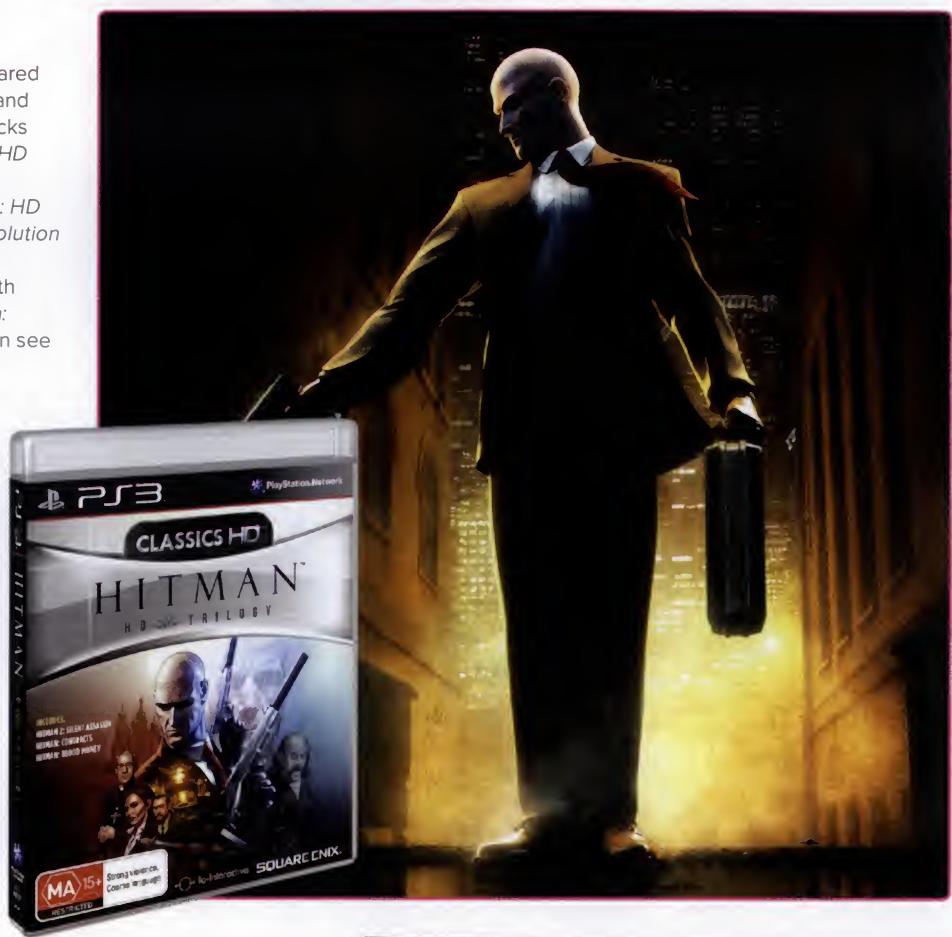
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in review



► GAME OF THE MONTH

Dead Space 3

Is Visceral's latest bone-chiller destined for a frosty reception?

Review ratings

10 **Incredible:** Perfection is relative and elusive, and no game will ever be *perfect*. Our 10 doesn't mean a game is flawless, it means a game has done everything it set out to do in an incredible fashion and thus it deserves our highest possible kudos.

9 **Excellent:** An outstanding game, either limited by its scope, sequel status (and lack of improvement) or a few too many minor blemishes from being a 10. Likely one of the best in its genre, a 9 comes with very high praise.

8 **Great:** Still well ahead of the pack in most departments despite a few issues here and there. Thoroughly recommended.

7 **Good:** A robust package that does a solid job despite a handful of mild to moderate problems. Enjoyable in parts, just not fantastic overall.

6 **Decent:** This game will have some noticeable flaws that may make it hard to recommend to those who aren't fans of the genre, but it will do more right than it does wrong. Just.

5 **Mediocre:** A conceded pass, if you know what we mean. Half okay, but half-busted. Might scrape by for fans, but with the quality games we do have, there's no need to drop real money on a game that half sucks.

4 **Poor:** Anything below 5, strictly speaking, is a fail – but there are degrees of 'bad' just as there are degrees of 'good'. A 4 is unrefined, partially broken and poorly designed.

3 **Very disappointing:** Things start to go very wrong here – fundamentally flawed in many ways, boring and close to pointless.

2 **Terrible:** Nothing good here, and definitely not worth removing the wrapper.

1 **The worst:** Reserved for the very worst gaming could ever offer. A broken, offensive mess without a single redeeming quality. If a 10 is better than virtually every game available, a 1 is worse than virtually every game available. OPS has handed out this score only once.



▼ We choose to review our games on a super-slick Full HD 1080p 40" Sony Bravia for the best picture possible.



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Dead Space 3

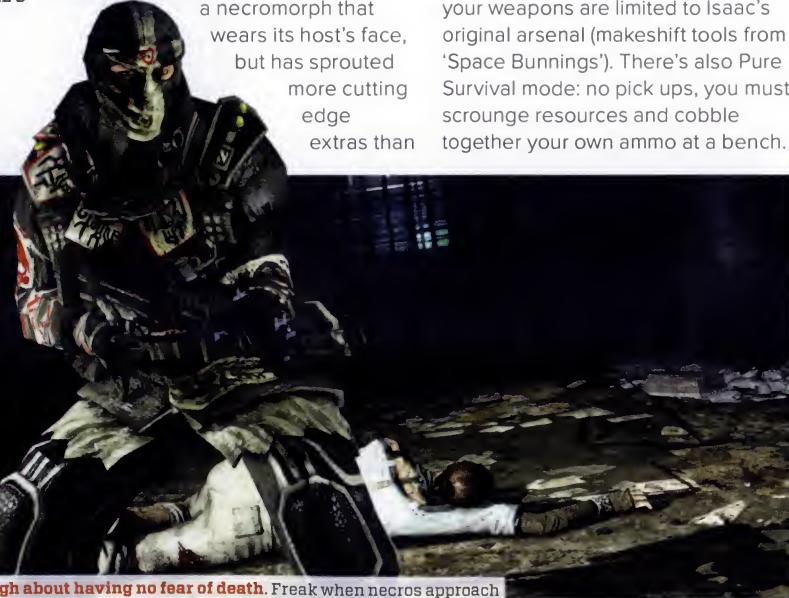
It's got chills, they're multiplyin'



Info

FORMAT: PS3
GENRE: ACTION-ADVENTURE
RELEASE: OUT NOW
DISTRIBUTOR: EA
DEVELOPER: VISCERAL GAMES
PLAYERS: 1-2
RRP: \$109.95

► **PLAY THIS IF YOU LIKE:**
 RESIDENT EVIL 5



The Dead Space you know is gone. It died. The second those end credits finished it left a beautiful, cult-hit corpse that began to mutate over the course of *Dead Space 2*.

If you haven't already, apply some zombie-movie logic and stop hugging it to your bosom. Because the fullness of time has twisted what you once loved into *Dead Space 3*, a necromorph that wears its host's face, but has sprouted more cutting edge extras than

Batman's Swiss Army Knife. *DS3* is a different beast, but it'll get under your skin if you give it half a chance.

The good news is: this sequel can offer the purist that perfect balance of old versus new, horror versus action – but only if they play through once as EA intends. A completed save unlocks Classic mode, which uses the aiming system from *Dead Space*, blocks the new co-op feature, and your weapons are limited to Isaac's original arsenal (makeshift tools from 'Space Bunnings'). There's also Pure Survival mode: no pick ups, you must scrounge resources and cobble together your own ammo at a bench.

Still not brutal and old-school enough for you, Manjaw McJoystick? Well how about Hardcore mode: one life, and when it's lost the game resets all your progress to zero, autosaves, and kicks you back to the titlescreen.

Honestly, if you can play any of those bonus modes on Impossible difficulty, in a dark room, with the sound cranked – without your bunghole puckering once – you don't need a different *Dead Space* sequel. You need a proctologist. Something is very wrong down there.

All this isn't a roundabouts way of saying that the default *DS3* experience is terrible – far from it. We had a blast playing as the long-suffering Isaac Clarke, an engineer who's coerced into thwarting an intergalactic cult of nefarious Scien...er, Unitologists. These nutcases have triggered a necromorph-creating Marker in Isaac's lunar colony home, prompting a trip to the alien homeworld that houses a doomsday master-switch.

Many a neckbeard was torn over Isaac leaving his usual haunts for the ice planet Tau Volantis. Relax about that: a decent chunk of *DS3* still has you in the claustrophobic innards of infected colonies, the cold embrace of zero G space, and many derelict

Unitologists AI: Talk tough about having no fear of death. Freak when necros approach



"Lucky friendly-fire is off, dingus"

ships pregnant with silence (among other things).

DS3 is also the least linear game in the series. We counted 10 clearly signposted Optional Missions dotted throughout the game's 19 chapters. Each of them offers a path of divergence that's packed with much-needed collectibles, story beats that flesh out the world and, of course, more nerve-fraying ambushes.

When you do get planet-side it's also refreshing to stretch one's legs and shake off a bit of franchise fatigue. Isaac battles blizzard temperatures like he does his air supply in space, and all that extra room lets you take full advantage of his improved mobility and skill-set. Most notably, double tapping **L2** causes a dive-roll, and clicking **R3** makes you crouch to engage an 'non-stick cover system'. If you're within the general orbit of a low object, Isaac will then auto-duck under incoming fire and can meerkat up to return fire if **L1** is held. Simple, elegant stuff.

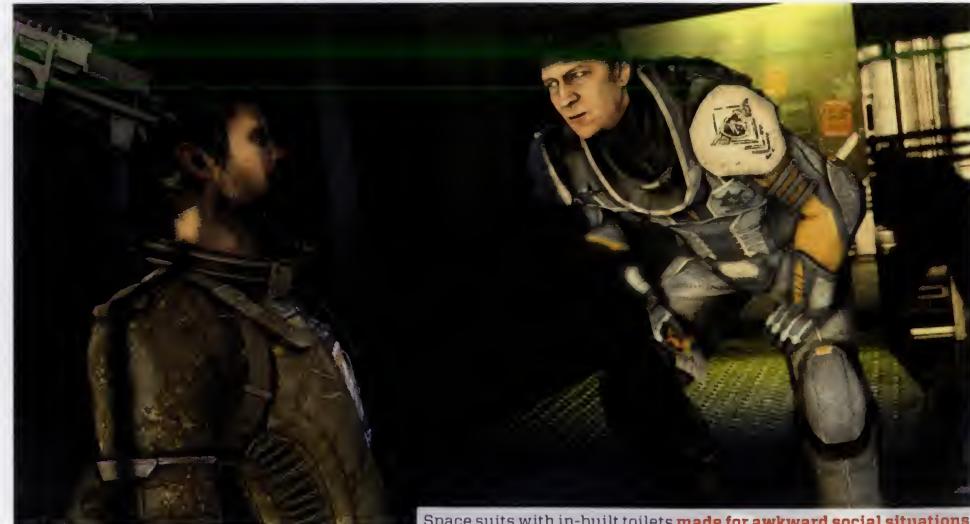
This new system simply doesn't factor in with the necromorphs. They appear so quickly in too great a number to give you time to set up a considered defence. It's still very much about back-pedaling, managing distances and trying to keep your cool.

Basically, the gun-toting human enemies are in surprisingly short supply and you'll use cover maybe a handful

of times. Good thing, too, as while the new firefights are fun, they do feel a little tacked on. The enemy AI won't win any awards, though they'd place highly in a conga line contest, as that's their favourite, ultra-aggressive tactic. Likewise, Visceral has committed a third-person shooter sin by neglecting to include a 'change shoulder' function. Any enemy bullet coming at you from around a lefthand corner always has right of way.

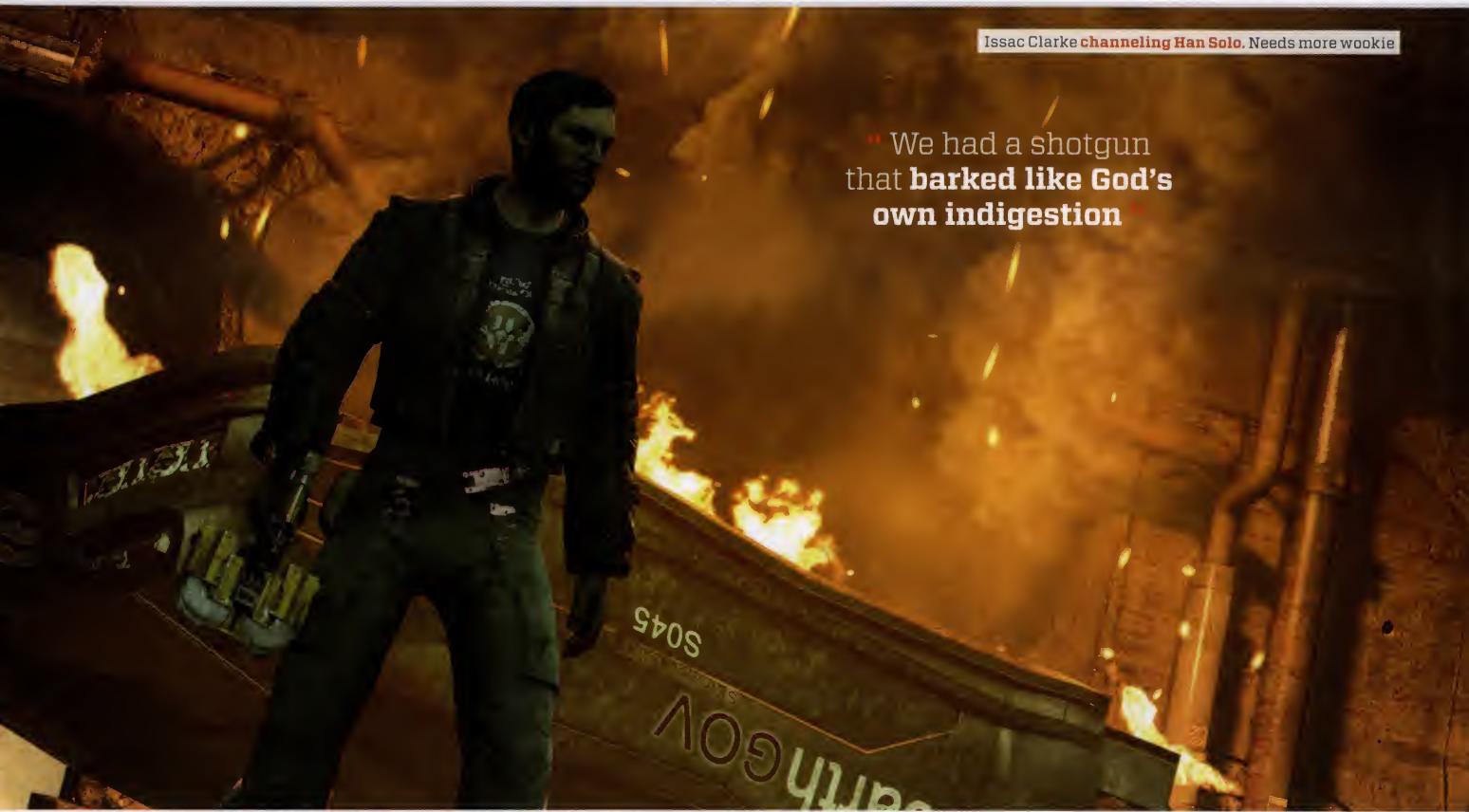
While we're on the topic of lead swapping, *DS3* has stolen our idea for

a chain of family-orientated stores with its Build-Your-Own-Boomstick feature. You start the game with your ever-faithful Plasma Cutter and a submachine gun, but during the campaign you can acquire quite a large number blueprints containing plans for pre-configured weapons, all of which have stupid names (like 'HUN1 Badger', 'Intimid8r' or the 'shootbanger'). As per the other games in the series, you can then upgrade those firearms with circuits that improve reload, firerate, damage and ammo capacity.



Space suits with in-built toilets made for awkward social situations

"We had a shotgun
that **barked like God's
own indigestion**"



The more creative psychotics among you can even slap together your own weapon from scratch. You choose a frame, attach two weapon parts, and then add a scope, or a tip that effects what the gun does when you yank the trigger. For example, we had a shotgun that barked like God's own indigestion, and it also put our victim into stasis and electrocuted them. Took, like, 10 seconds to reload, but what are you gonna do?

If you've got the skills you can bypass all this DIY and just plug your way through *DS3* on a respectable difficulty with nothing more than a steadily upgraded Plasma Cutter. It's also worth noting that for the first time in the series ammo is universal to all guns. This might turn off those of you who feel that balancing ammo and managing an ever-dwindling supply of resources is a staple of survival horror. The good news is all that frantic stock-taking is still alive and well in *DS3*, it's just taken a different form.

Isaac is basically the Trash Lady from the movie *The Labyrinth*; he's always keen to seagull up crappy old gels, tungsten, wires, diodes – probably even toilet rolls, macaroni and cellophane – to use in the construction of better equipment and stat-improving upgrades of said gear.

To aid in that hobo quest you can opt to switch out your gun for a special Scavenger bot that indicates 'junktastic' spots in the levels. Providing six ice-axe wielding necros don't leap out of a snowdrift and make your face into a doily, you can plant your Bot at the spot. Over the course of 10 real-time minutes it'll automatically ferry your precious crud to a waiting Bench. It's a pretty cool risk-reward mechanic that you'll come to rely

upon in the harder difficulty levels.

You might also be tempted to place your faith in *DS3*'s new two-player, drop-in/drop-out multiplayer. Isaac is 'joined' by John Carver, an EarthGov soldier who is committed to stopping the Unitologists. And when we say 'joined', we really mean 'you never see him as an AI in the game, but he quite creepily shows up next to you for the odd cutscene'. Dude's a ninja. It's actually pretty disconcerting.

Play solo and you won't really get to know Carver, beyond the fact that

he's an unlikeable dick who'll sacrifice people at the drop of a hat. Hook up in co-op, however, and you'll be privy to a lot of added dialogue between Isaac and Carver, and an additional five hours of Carver-only side missions.

The best part of those is the fact that the Carver player will experience his increasing dementia, Isaac will see practically none of it. There are a number of times when one player will have to protect the other from their own inner demons, typically as a squad of real-life



"The Unitologist plan will unify all flesh into one big space orgy. See you in there." **"Retching noises"**



TRUFAX: In space no one can hear you squeal either

"Do yourself a favour and play DS3 like a raving masochist, straight off the bat"

ones are advancing, unseen.

Co-op is a decent addition to the formula, that makes a hell of a lot more sense than DS2's ropey adversarial multi. That said, it sucks that the option to just 'play as Carver' by yourself isn't there. Instead you'll need to find a stooge willing to suck it up and be good ol' default Isaac while you're the lucky one who gets to go on a psychedelic mind-trip as Carver. Either way somebody has to be the greedy bastard here, and that's not a good starting point for any co-op adventure.

As you might imagine, the fear-factor drops with a buddy in co-op. DS3 in general isn't insta-heart attack stuff. That's not from a lack of trying on Visceral's part; horrors regularly jack-in-the-box, but more often than not the level designer's liberal placing of items give away the fight-for-your-life sections.

We're not sure if we've been around necromorphs for too long, or what, but the best that can be said about DS3 is that it's extremely intense in places. The fact is that after three games Isaac's ever-increasing abilities has made us feel much too empowered. Pair your ability to make

any gun you need with stasis and kinesis, and there's not much you can't overcome.

So do yourself a favour and play DS3 like a raving masochist, straight off the bat. It's a slick, AAA sequel that's worthy of its place in the franchise, but only if you take the initiative and crank the difficulty.

We didn't think it possible, but Visceral has engineered a sequel that will appease old fans and entice new ones, too. Kinesis grab a copy, today. **Adam Mathew**



Turns out the NGK Pool Club was being literal about having sharks

No Save For You

Here's something new. Unlike all the previous *Dead Space* iterations, *Dead Space 3* doesn't feature manual save kiosks. You're at the mercy of the autosave feature, which has the potential to be a pain in the butt in the harder difficulties.

When the autosave does kick in, your character is kept persistent. All of your gear, crafted weapons and trophy progress will stay with you even if you haven't completed the level. This means you can effectively use the chapter select function to repeat a level if you think you've missed something. Or to milk it.

Final Say

PRESENTATION Visceral is still the master of light and shadow here. Heaps of block buster action scenes, because everything Isaac stands on seems to explode or fall off a cliff.

SOUND Great voice acting makes the 'bitter love triangle' sub-plot pop. Ambient sounds don't get better than this.

CONTROLS Isaac's sprier than a ballboy now, making for less punishing boss fights. Cover system works well enough but has a few niggles.

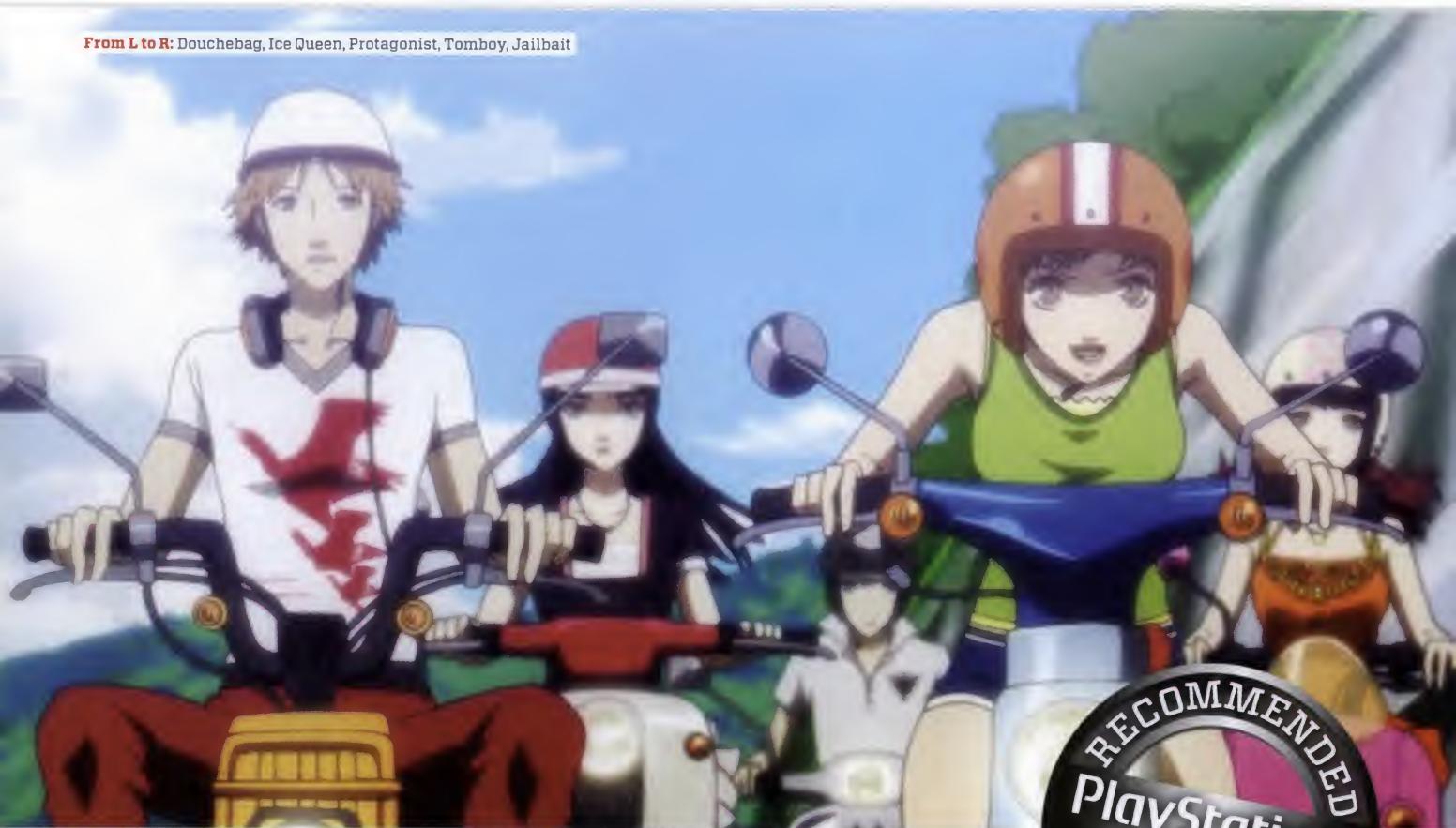
REPLAY VALUE Tonnes of guns to create and swap. Plenty of punishing extra modes for trophy-folk. Co-op that's well worth a replay.

Verdict

Staves off sequelitis, doesn't alienate fans. Offers sound and visuals slicker than the ice planet it's set on.

8

From L to R: Douchebag, Ice Queen, Protagonist, Tomboy, Jailbait



Persona 4 Golden

Golden showers Vita owners with bonus content



What do you have booked tomorrow afternoon? Who will you spend time with? Don't forget that you need to study. Basketball practice too. Oh, and there's that whole save anyone stuck inside the television before the fog comes and they turn up murdered thing.

Info
FORMAT: PS VITA
GENRE: JRPG
RELEASE: FEBRUARY 22
DISTRIBUTOR: ATLUS
DEVELOPER: ATLUS
PLAYERS: 1
RRP: \$49.95

► PLAY THIS IF YOU LIKE:
 PERSONA 3

Persona experts alike. It is a massive and complicated title that requires focused investment to parse.

At heart, it's a story about moving town, making new friends and forming social connections through work, sport, commitment and play. Entering into the TV to battle shadow demons and the evil personas of those trapped inside the shadow world are just part of the game's fabric. Just as the fog in one world leaves and appears in the other after several days of rain, your actions in both universes reinforce and inform what happens on the flip side.

Deciding to eschew your part time job to go to basketball practice builds your relationship with your teammates and may increase your diligence statistic, but it comes at the cost of both money and time lost with your various other friends.

This sounds a bit naff on paper, but it's a brilliantly complex mechanic which ties in with the supernatural beings that you summon in battle, your personas. Gaining personas is achieved via winning them in the card shuffle after battle as well as genetically combining personas in the Velvet Room.

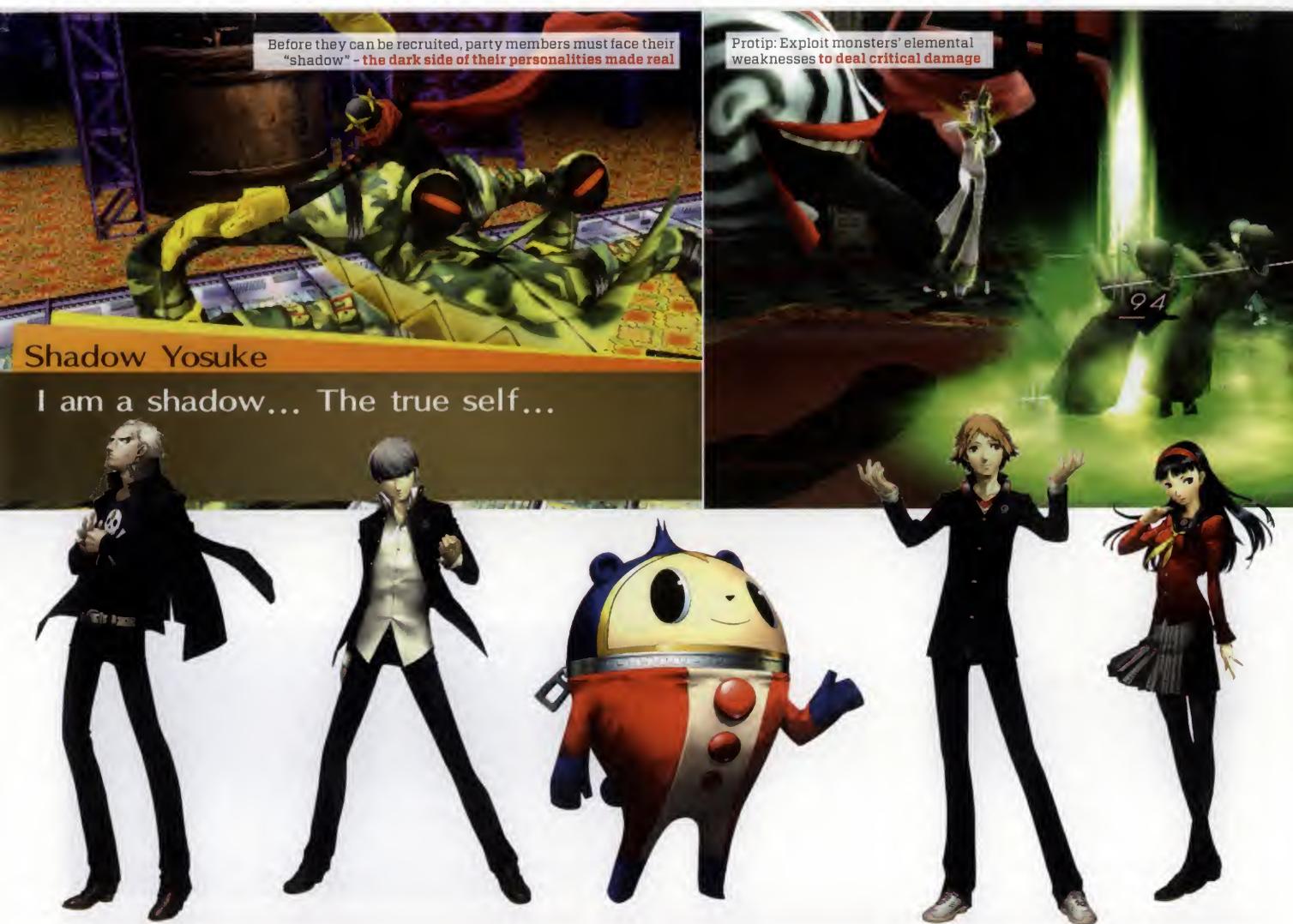
Personas differ in their abilities, both defensive and offensive, and they

also belong to different classes. In turn, these align with your various social links, thus boosting specific statistics, experience points and abilities whenever you fight alongside friends of a similar alignment. In this way, spending with Chie becomes more than a potential date; it's an investment in the year to come, boosting your strength for the battles ahead.

Time plays a major role in P4G. There are not really any levels per se, but rather you are given a full year in which to solve the mystery of the town's murders. At first, that seems overly generous, but it's not long before three, four or more things build up each day, all vying for your precious after school hours. Your responsibilities stretch to breaking point between building up social links, earning money, studying and entering the shadow world to work your way through progressively harder dungeons/towers.

Being a JRPG, combat is necessarily complex yet logical. Any magical attacks are enacted by your equipped persona, which levels up with you. Your own levelling affects the level of persona that you are able to create. Physical attacks are usually the weaker option, but a blacksmith in town will kit you out with a sword and





Shadow Yosuke

I am a shadow... The true self...

“A massive and complicated title that requires focused investment to parse”

armour in any case. Find a creature's weak spot – be it electricity, wind, fire or what have you – and knock it down and you'll get “1 more”, an extra move to inflict bonus damage.

Finding these weaknesses is important and will build up an encyclopaedia of knowledge for when you analyse a creature to see which tactic will best defeat it. You

can have as much or as little input in the actions of your team via in-game options. If you're happy to have them do their own thing you can leave them be, or give them instructions to conserve SP, act as defensive support or, in dire situations, take over every single move.

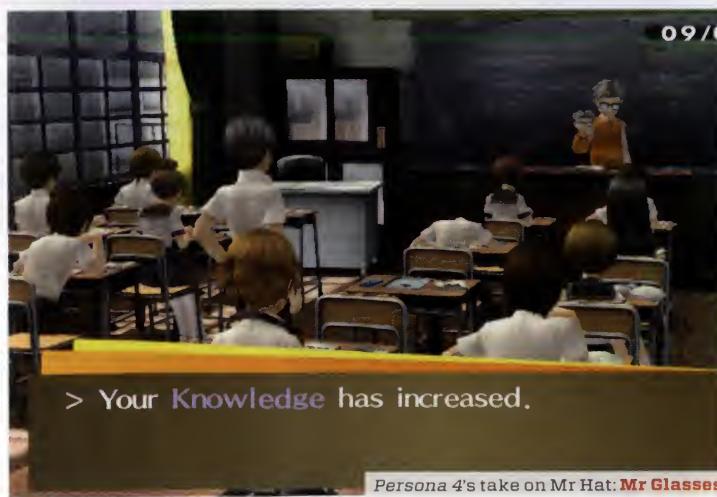
Light dialogue and carefree Japanese lifestyles are juggled

with heavy themes of death, affairs, jealousy, resentment and corruption. At times, the story drags and characters irk, stretching out entirely simple and innocuous subjects and themes to the point of breaking. You truly do need to be aware of the massive investment needed to complete the game, with upwards of 70 hours required if you wish to see one of the game's good endings.

More than double that is needed for the true ending, which requires playing through New Game +. Thankfully, this is made more bearable by the inclusion of a “fast-forward” feature and the fact that PS Vita is perfect for repeat plays, turning long stretches without save points into easily interrupted gaming sessions via its inherent sleep ability.

Persona 4 Golden is a Tardis of a game. Initially, it seems cute and friendly and it hooks you with its murder mystery and time management focus. Once you get inside, it opens up exponentially, awing you with its scope. Quite a bit of this is filler, with an overabundance of inconsequential dialogue. Indeed, you may well never see the end of this one. But that's what the Internet is for, right?

— Dylan Burns



> Your Knowledge has increased.

Persona 4's take on Mr Hat: Mr Glasses

Final Say

PRESENTATION: Meticulous, colourful and vibrant. A lot of effort has gone into this port and it looks swish on the PS Vita's screen.

SOUND: Gorgeous funk/J-pop soundtrack that injects the entire game with life.

CONTROLS: A lot of pressing **△** to move dialogue along is needed, but otherwise pretty standard JRPG interactions apply.

REPLAY VALUE: With a massive story length and New Game +, you can pretty much play this game forever if you wanted.

Verdict

Come for the jazzy tunes and gregarious characters, stay for the social systems and deeper mystery.

8

Knytt Underground

Everything's (not so) happy



Here is a knitting joke: how did the woman knit **steel** armour?

Part platformer and part adventure title, *Knytt Underground* demands you go exploring its caves while you find your abilities and discover who your character, Mi, really is. Each screen in this 'Metroidvania' head-scratcher is its own entity, with hidden paths and pixel-perfect jumps punctuating the traps and puzzles.

There are nearly 2,000 rooms to go through and the world expands upwards and outwards; thankfully a map keeps track of where you've been but only sometimes where you need to go. What you really need to do is push at its boundaries and just go wandering. Very little is signposted, characters handing

Info

FORMAT: PS3/PS VITA
GENRE: ADVENTURE
RELEASE: OUT NOW
DISTRIBUTOR: RIPSTONE
DEVELOPER: GREENHILL

PLAYERS: 1
RRP: \$19.95

► **PLAY THIS IF YOU LIKE:**
 OUTLAND

out fetch quests (once you find them) and sometimes with little indication where the often arbitrary items are.

At times it feels directionless. The story is pretty flimsy and unconvincing, though fourth-wall-breaking nods and references to 'real life' are littered amongst the amateur dialogue. Don't let the scrappy story stop you though, as there's a lot of joy in actually doing what you need to do.

By default your character can climb up walls and perform enormous leaps, and multi-screen drops into water or onto land aren't fatal. Hit the second chapter and you'll also be able to bounce around as a ball – it can be quite gruelling and chaotic, but stick with it and *Knytt Underground* proves to be very fulfilling.

■ **Paul Taylor**

Final Say

PRESENTATION

'Clean' at best, 'rudimentary' at worst.

SOUND Beautiful musical interludes that are few and far between.

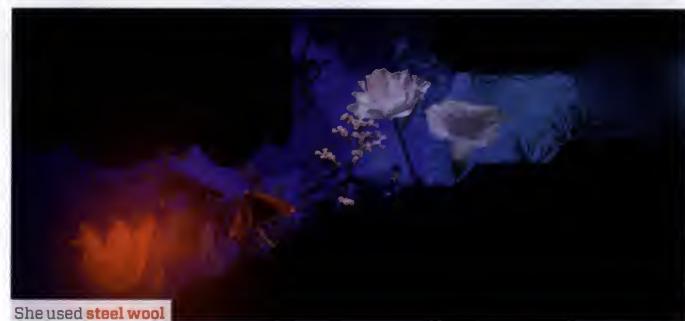
CONTROLS A little fiddly on PS Vita, but old-school platformer fans will lap it up.

REPLAY VALUE You want trophies? Prepare to go searching, everything's well hidden.

Verdict

It might look simple but prepare to have your brain tickled and tested.

7



For the everyman, *The Cave* is a little plodding. Three out of seven characters can enter the self-narrating cave at any one time, and once they're within its confines new themed rooms open up, depending on who's in your party. If you want to find all of its secrets you'll need to play *The Cave* multiple times.

These different environments require careful observation to pre-empt the solutions to their puzzles. You don't have an inventory, so you're required to pick up an item and run with it – literally. Grab the wrong one you'll have to backtrack to the right item, and with no fast travel you'll be treading over old ground a lot. Sometimes the glorious-looking backdrops meld into one, so if you haven't been paying attention you'll probably get lost.

That's the main problem with *The Cave*, but it's saved by three-player co-op. Get a couple of likeminded friends on the same couch and you'll find your old favourites can still rock out. ■ **Clint McCreadie**



The question you should ask is **who lit these torches in a deserted cave?**

The Cave

Spe-looky here

Info

FORMAT: PS3
GENRE: ADVENTURE
RELEASE: OUT NOW
DISTRIBUTOR: SEGA
DEVELOPER: DOUBLE FINE PRODUCTIONS
PLAYERS: 1
RRP: \$19.95

► **PLAY THIS IF YOU LIKE:**
 THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND, TRINE

In some ways *The Cave* is like a supergroup made up of your third-favourite bands. You have Ron Gilbert, famed for his work on *The Secret of Monkey Island*, and Double Fine, lead by the enigmatic Tim Schafer who also worked on *The Secret of Monkey Island* and *Psychonauts*.

They're both thoroughly capable and entertaining but never make a headline act. Together they've crafted something pretty enjoyable and rare – which you'll love if you already like their style.

Final Say

PRESENTATION Lovely animation, and really smart design – mostly.

SOUND Ominous but funny narration backed by a great score.

CONTROLS Platform fans will be at home here. Could be a bit snappier, though.

REPLAY VALUE Loads to find with some tough puzzles on the way.

Verdict

It's a pity the backtracking mars an otherwise clever title.

7

Earth Defense Force 2017 Portable

Starship bloopers



This is a good bit, but you won't see it 'til you've already finished the campaign

Info

FORMAT: PS VITA
GENRE: ACTION
RELEASE: OUT NOW
DISTRIBUTOR: NAMCO
BANDAI PARTNERS
DEVELOPER: SANDLOT
PLAYERS: 1 - 4
RRP: \$54.95

► **PLAY THIS IF YOU LIKE:**
 THE ORIGINAL

Old games being made into new games are all the rage, donchaknow, and even though PS Vita could do with more full-blown titles to show off its wonderful tech and potential, a crusty PS2 game that was bogus way back when isn't in vogue at all. And definitely not at that price.

The premise remains the same as the similarly awful PS3 version of *Earth Defense Force*. Aliens are attacking Earth, spewing huge ant-like creature and B-movie robots all over your city. You go in under the

pretence of having teammates who can shoot but really it's you versus the bugs and a clenched trigger finger. It does get better with mates if you can rope them in.

Everything about *EDF 2017* is a slog. Graphically atrocious and sonically awful, low-res buildings comically disappear after being grazed by heavy weaponry. While the bugs and bots twitch and spasm around their own character models, the bipedal robots are the worst offenders here, often getting caught up in their own limbs.

AI teammates only exist to spout the same half-dozen one liners over and over and over until they either cop a face-full of acid/lasers, or perhaps be blissfully euthanized by your own weaponry. Things pick up when you finally unlock the Pale Wing, a flying mech suit, but that's sort of like getting your choc-top after the movie's finished. ▶ **Paul Taylor**



The Farcical 4

Final Say

PRESENTATION

Laughable. It was basic on PS2, here it's rudimentary.

SOUND AI teammates have the variety and depth of a child's pull-toy. The toys are a little less predictable, however.

CONTROLS Standard third-person affair. You can turn off all the pointless touchscreen camera controls.

REPLAY VALUE The flying mech opens up at the end, which is actually cool. Should've been there from the start though.

Verdict

A train-wreck of a game half-salvaged by a reasonable multiplayer mode. You can dodge it entirely.

5

Hitman: HD Trilogy

A target worth taking out

Info

FORMAT: PS3
GENRE: ACTION-ADVENTURE
RELEASE: OUT NOW
DISTRIBUTOR: NAMCO
BANDAI PARTNERS
DEVELOPER: IO INTERACTIVE
PLAYERS: 1
RRP: \$49.95

► **PLAY THIS IF YOU LIKE:**
 KILLING TIME

When we heard about *Hitman 2: Silent Assassin*, *Hitman: Contracts* and *Hitman: Blood Money* arriving in a pack, three things happened. Somebody said "talk about a greatest hits collection", sunglasses were put on, and someone else screamed "yeaaahh".

Hitman 2 is obviously the roughest of this bunch. While the AI is dopey, the textures aren't well-served by the sharper resolution and the polygon limit makes 47's



Ah, the old **hide-the-gun-behind-your-back** trick

bald head look like a pineapple, that unique *Hitman* formula is enough to keep you hooked and coming back.

This series is basically a third-person shooter married with a stealth game and a puzzler. Guns ablazing is for rookies. You'll soon crave the satisfaction that comes from rigging events to turn a bloody murder into a bloody hilarious accident.

Contracts refined that formula to some degree, but it's *Blood Money* that makes this package purchase-worthy. It introduced NPC shields, better combat, climbing, body disposal and oddball improvised weapons and disguises.

Sadly, not a lot of love has gone into cleaning up these remakes. The time capsule is rusty, but there's enough old school challenge and timeless dark humour to justify a buy. ▶ **Clint McCreadie**



Final Say

PRESENTATION From oldest game to latest: ugmo, getting acceptable, easy on the eyes.

SOUND Some of the best dynamic, in-mission music ever made.

CONTROLS Changes quite a bit between the games, which is frustrating. They're all servicable once you get to grips.

REPLAY VALUE Expect to explore and replay levels a lot (without too much rage). Heaps of Easter Eggs to uncover.

Verdict

If you hate trial and error, you'll hate this. But if you want a challenge look no further.

7



Worst. Hors d'oeuvres. Ever

Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath

Furry justice

The slow and steady resurrection of the *Oddworld* universe continues with this very decent port of the 2005 title that never appeared on PS2. It's been lovingly updated for a widescreen platform, and on PS Vita a few deft touchscreen modifications have been implemented to compensate for two missing shoulder buttons.

You are Stranger, a bounty hunter in a weird wild west who despises guns. Instead, he carries a double-barrelled crossbow that can be loaded with different types of live ammo – quite literally. These caricatures of animals either entice enemies, distract them or incapacitate them outright.

Stranger's Wrath remains unique in that it straddles a third- and first-

person viewpoint; the former for shooting, the latter for exploring and traversing the environment at speed.

More than seven years on and *Stranger's Wrath* is still fresh. Apart from some annoying pop-up tutorial boxes on PS Vita and some niggling issues when retrieving ammo, it's still unabashedly brilliant. A must buy for sure. **Paul Taylor**



Life of Pixel

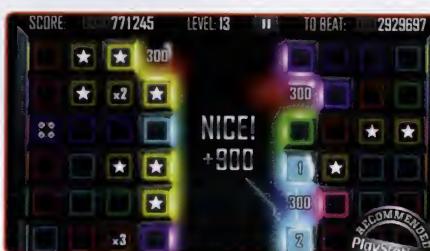
FORMAT: PS VITA GENRE: PLATFORMER
RELEASE: OUT NOW DISTRIBUTOR: SUPER ICON
DEVELOPER: SUPER ICON PLAYERS: 1 RRP: \$3.45

Simultaneously a wistful romp through the evolution of consoles of yesteryear that were probably made before you were born, and the type of punishing platformers that were on those consoles. It's balls-out hard pretty much from the get go, demanding pixel-perfect (snarf) jumps and committing entire levels to memory. There's a point where it goes from being cute to very annoying, though. An update may fix this.

Verdict

Clever at first then downright punishing and borderline unfair.

6



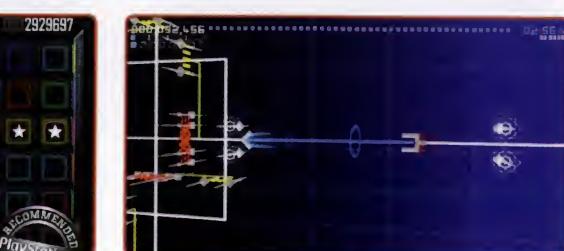
Surge

FORMAT: PS VITA GENRE: PUZZLE
RELEASE: OUT NOW DISTRIBUTOR: FUTURLAB
DEVELOPER: FUTURLAB PLAYERS: 1 RRP: \$5.45

Futurlab are quickly making a name for themselves as grade-A indie devs, and *Surge* is a highlight in their tidy catalogue. It's a tile matching affair with tonnes of modifiers working for and against you, all in the pursuit of a bigger and more elusive highscore. As pressure builds in each stage, the tiles have to be removed to open up the coloured valves. The most bangin' soundtrack this side of *WipEout* keeps the atmosphere tense.

Verdict

A stylish reaction and skills-based puzzler. Perfect for short stints.



escapeVektor

FORMAT: PS VITA GENRE: ACTION RELEASE: OUT NOW DISTRIBUTOR: NN000 DEVELOPER: NN000 PLAYERS: 1 RRP: \$15.95

Believe it or not, this Australian-made title is more like *Pac-Man* than you'd initially think. The goal is to skirt along every line in each stage's maze as the titular Vektor, covering every line so that the next maze becomes available. Enemies patrol the lines, and you'll have to either dodge them and their various traps or blow them up. There's plenty to do with the levels quickly becoming more and more fiendish. Very smart.

Verdict

Whip-quick thrills from a home-grown dev. Check it out.

8

Info

FORMAT: PS VITA
GENRE: SHOOTER
RELEASE: OUT NOW
DISTRIBUTOR: ODDWORLD INHABITANTS
DEVELOPER: JUST ADD WATER
PLAYERS: 1
RRP: \$19.95

► PLAY THIS IF YOU LIKED: ABE'S ODDYSEE, ANY SHOOTER FROM THE LAST DECADE

Final Say

PRESENTATION
Superbly done, save for tutorial boxes that can get in the way.

SOUND Stranger's drawl is a highlight, as it the 'pop' when he captures a bounty.

CONTROLS Fiddly when capturing some ammo, otherwise fine and predictable.

REPLAY VALUE
A new difficulty setting, and situations can be tackled in different ways.

Verdict

It's a bit better on PS3, but this PS Vita version has seen no less love. A brilliant title with minor problems. Get it!

7

Competition

Write in, score prizes

WIN!
NI NO KUNI: WRATH
OF THE WHITE
WITCH AND
STUDIO GHIBLI
PRIZE PACK!
DETAILS BELOW



Win a *Ni No Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch* and Studio Ghibli prize pack!

Includes a copy of the game and two Studio Ghibli movies on Blu-ray!

Studio Ghibli are one of Japan's premier animation studios, and for the first time ever they've teamed up with one of Japan's most prolific development studios, Level-5, to make the completely excellent *Ni No Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch*. It's a JRPG that looks like an anime but plays with the depth and grace of a 30-hour-plus adventure.

Thanks to Namco Bandai Partners, you can win a copy of *Ni No Kuni* along with Studio Ghibli's animes, *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Arrietty Special Edition*, both on Blu-ray.

In *Ni No Kuni*, a young boy called Oliver enters the world of Ni No Kuni, a parallel universe in which he hopes to find and

rescue his recently deceased mother. Accompanied by Drippy, a childhood toy brought to life, and carrying a book of magic, Oliver meets versions of people and animals he knows from the 'real' world to help him in his quest.

Studio Ghibli's anime's *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Arrietty* are two classics that belong in everyone's Blu-ray collection, and by answering the question below in 25 words or less and following the entry instructions, you can win one of these prize packs!

Question: what childhood toy would you most like to bring to life, and why?



How to Enter

To enter this Official PlayStation Magazine – Australia competition email your entries to ops@citrusmedia.com.au with 'Ni No Kuni comp' in the subject line. Only one email entry is allowed – multiple entries will be deleted. Alternatively, send clearly marked postal entries to **Ni No Kuni comp, Citrus Media, PO Box 20154, World Square, NSW 2002**. Please include your name, age, and addresses with your answers (email and postal). For postal entries please write all details on the back of the envelope. **Competitions close 26/03/2013.** Winners will be notified by mail.

Ni No Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch is available in stores now. For more Studio Ghibli on Blu-Ray, visit madman.com.au/studioghibli

internet

NEWS, DLC,
REVIEWS

► WHAT'S NEW

PSN DEVELOPMENTS

What you can expect to see and play on the PSN

Well finally. After months of hemming and hawing about "technical difficulties" Bethesda Softworks has at last confirmed that the entire backlog of add-on content for *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* will be available for purchase from PSN this month.

Unfortunately, an exact release date and pricing details were not available at the time of writing, but what we do know is that each add-on will be sold at 50% discount for the first week it's available. So, assuming it hasn't all been released by the time you read this, you should totally get on that and take advantage of Bethesda's apologetic generosity.

Based solely on the fact that it lets you tame and ride a goddamn dragon, we're pretty confident that *Dragonborn* will be pick of the pack, although we've heard good things about the vampire-themed *Dawnguard* expansion as well. *Hearthfire*, in which you can purchase land, build a house, and raise a family of adopted children, sounds like it could be good fun for a few hours in a *Sims*-y kind of way, but maybe not so much beyond that.

In other, non-*Skyrim* related news, developer Deep Silver has announced that it is bringing *Sacred Citadel* to PSN in a few months time. An unusual spin-off of Deep Silver's popular *Sacred* RPG series, *Sacred Citadel* will feature



What a bonehead

— and we're quoting the trailer here — "wild warriors", "b*tchin battles", "ridonkulous rides", and "crazy co-op". So: a vibrant multiplayer brawler with a cartoony art-style and a self-aware, potentially insufferable sense of humour. Sounds good! Mostly! We'll keep you updated as new details come our way.

Finally, music video service VidZone has been updated with a whole host of neato social features. Among other things, you can now send and receive videos, follow other users and access their playlists, create collaborative playlists, and explore artists in detail with new artist Zone pages. Cool beans.



VIDZONE PLAYLIST SPOTLIGHT

THIS MONTH: Blink 182 VIP list



PHOENIX - 1901

These three videos follow a couple of thematic threads. First up, this French band set up a light show that amplifies their punchy indie rock.



THE DRUMS - LET'S GO SURFING

Not a typo. The delicate but fast-paced vocals get a good deal of emphasis when the word 'SURFING' pops up.



KANYE WEST - ALL OF THE LIGHTS

And then Mr. West ties the lot together with a hyperactive light show, and big bold words about LIGHTS LIGHTS LIGHTS! ALL OF THE LIGHTS!

VidZone is the largest online music video VOD service in the world, and it's available **free** on PS3. Download the vidzone application and you'll have access to over 30,000 music videos at the push of a button!



PlayStation®Network

ESSENTIAL DOWNLOADS



NI NO KUNI

Enjoy the biggest RPG release of the year in this magical journey into a parallel universe. Exquisite visuals, a refreshing combat system and an endearing story. Truly fulfilling.



DMC

Dante as you've never seen him before with higher production values, an engrossing story line and kick-ass combat. For all the whiny babies out there, the haircut is not a problem.



FAR CRY 3 DELUXE BUNDLE DLC

Six single player missions, four rare animals to hunt, a bow and flare gun for multiplayer and all previously released retail bonuses, for just under \$16.



AC III: THE BATTLE HARDENED PACK

Three new multiplayer characters, three maps for multiplayer — Charlestown, Fort St-Mathieu and Saint Pierre — for the same price as a large pizza.



MOTORSTORM RC COMPLETE EDITION

Buy this on PS3 and get the PS Vita version for free. All the DLC — cars, tracks — for about \$15. It's an unbeatable bargain, and also allows for cross-play.

Uncovering Hitman HD Trilogy's Best Easter Eggs

Digging into IO's re-released stealth classics? You may have missed these hidden secrets the first time through.



Hitman Contracts: Paranormal Activities

There are no fewer than six ghosts in *Hitman: Contracts*' creepy 'Traditions of the Trade' level, all of which can only be found by lock-picking your way into the closed wing down the hallway to the right on the ground floor. There are five rooms through here, the first of which is coated in blood following a supposed 'nasty accident', and each one contains at least one ghost (108 contains two). So, you know, if you scare easily maybe stay away from this wing (but then *Hitman* perhaps isn't the game for the easily jostled).

Hitman Contracts: Mr 47, What Does DNA Stand For?

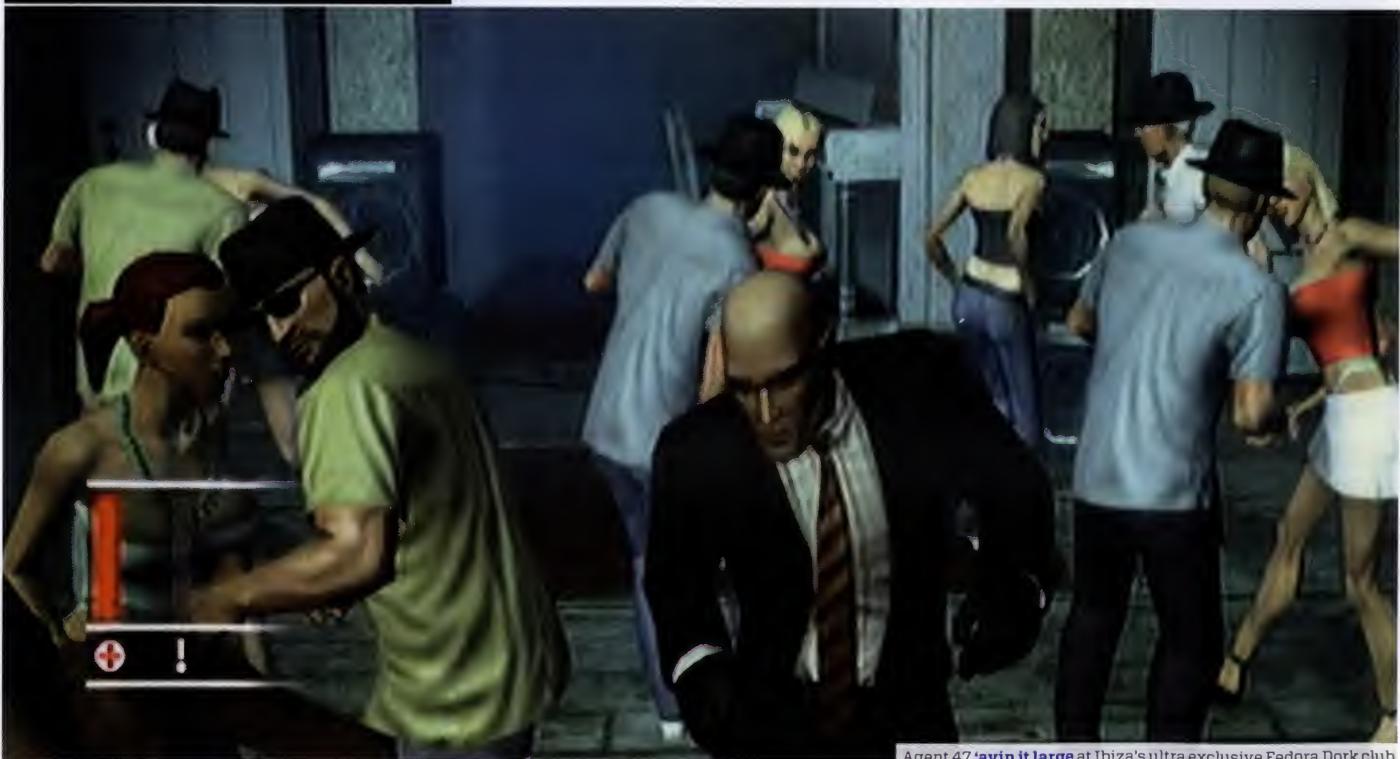
This one is complicated. During 'The Wang Four Incident', be on the lookout for an elevator that doesn't appear on your map – follow the path it leads you on and eventually you'll find Orthmeyer's key card. Go back to 'Asylum Aftermath' and use the card to open the two doors you'll find in the level. Near the Golden Desert Eagles, you'll find another surprise – there are tanks here with clones of various characters from the game. What does it all mean?

Hitman 2: Dopefish Lives!

The 'dopefish' from the *Commander Keen* series really gets around, having appeared in one form or another in a surprisingly huge number of games since his first appearance in 1991's *Secret of the Oracle*. The 'second dumbest fish alive' appears as a desk ornament in 'The Jacuzzi Job', sitting on Charlie's desk in the Jacuzzi room. Just because he's a gamer doesn't mean you don't have to kill Charlie, though.

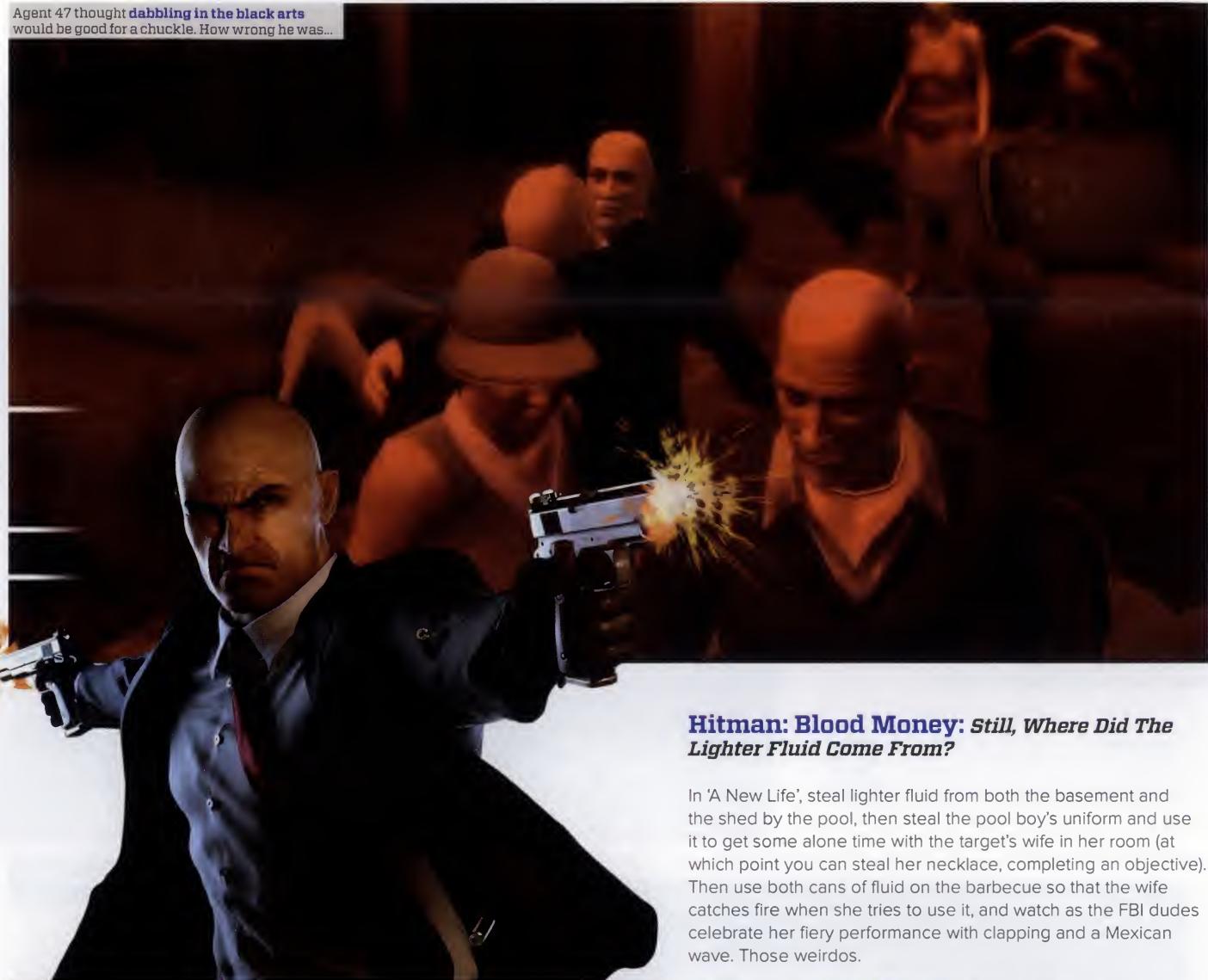
Hitman Contracts: This One Is Just Weird

If you love cult web-comic *Pokey The Penguin* as much as we do, you're one of the (probably very few) people who will get a kick out of this. In 'Slaying the Dragon', find the Ying-Yang symbol billboard (look up), and then shoot the white circle within the black section with a sniper rifle. An information box will pop up: "Hello? Observe the contents of my easter egg, small child!" Now, go and find the triad negotiators at the park, and they'll have speech bubbles from a specific *Pokey the Penguin* comic sticking out of their heads. How much sleep deprivation do you think inspired this one?



Agent 47 'avin it large at Ibiza's ultra exclusive Fedora Dork club

Agent 47 thought **dabbling in the black arts** would be good for a chuckle. How wrong he was...



Hitman: Blood Money: Still, Where Did The Lighter Fluid Come From?

In 'A New Life', steal lighter fluid from both the basement and the shed by the pool, then steal the pool boy's uniform and use it to get some alone time with the target's wife in her room (at which point you can steal her necklace, completing an objective). Then use both cans of fluid on the barbecue so that the wife catches fire when she tries to use it, and watch as the FBI dudes celebrate her fiery performance with clapping and a Mexican wave. Those weirdos.

Hitman: Blood Money: Killer Moves

Agent 47 doesn't exactly have moves like Jaggar, but you can still make him get down and boogie in *Blood Money* if you're so inclined. Leave 47 idle on the dance floor in any club in 'A Murder of Crows', or at the wedding in 'Til Death Do Us Part', and he'll bust out moves so awkward your dad would blush and excuse himself from the room.

Hitman: Blood Money: Argh! Zombies!

This one is wonderfully strange. At the start of the 'Death on the Mississippi' level, take a left, run up the stairs to your right, kill the guard and throw his body over the right rail in the room behind him. Go downstairs, kill the Gator Gang member following the other guard, drag him back to the same room and dump his body over the left rail. And now everyone on the boat is a zombie! How? Why? We may never know, but they'll mindlessly beat at you for the rest of the level. Also, the paper at the end of this level is dated 'Smarsh', because *Blood Money* is amazing.

Hitman: Blood Money: Killer Moves, Part Deux

In 'Amendment XXV', steal the old lady's briefcase at the start and take it with you into the White House (by stealing a bunch of uniforms, of course). Walk through into the big hall, find the fireplace (it's not burning), and throw the briefcase at the wall to the left of it three times. All the guards will line up and perform the Riverdance, which we suppose is a perfectly logical response to a potentially severe threat to national security.



He's just giving her a **flu booster**, we swear



Hey, they're trying to make Riverdance popular again! **Kill them all!**

► MUST WATCH

Batman: The Dark Knight Returns - Part 2 (M)

DIRECTOR: JAY OLIVA **CAST:** PETER WELLER, MARK VALLEY, ARIEL WINTER, MICHAEL EMERSON, DAVID SELBY, WADE WILLIAMS
AVAILABLE ON: BLU-RAY/DVD

Based on the groundbreaking 1986 graphic novel by Frank Miller, Batman emerges after a 10 year absence to retake Gotham's crime soaked streets as a viscous new gang called The Mutants terrorises the city. Whilst battling advancing years and a few all-stars from his rogues gallery, Batman and a newly recruited (female) Robin methodically pick the muties apart one by one. With Reagan still in The White House, the Cold War is in full swing. After a Russian nuke detonates in the upper atmosphere, the subsequent EMP blast renders the entire United States electronically impotent. As lawlessness runs rampant, only one city remains unaffected: Gotham. A vigilante-led police force proves to be an embarrassment to his administration, forcing Reagan to send the most potent weapon in his arsenal, Superman, to take down the Batman once and for all.

Watch this if you like *The Dark Knight*

Verdict An exceptional adaptation of one of the most critically acclaimed graphic novels of all time.

9

**Bait** (MA15+)

DIRECTOR: KIMBLE RENDALL **CAST:** XAVIER SAMUEL, SHARNI VINSON, RICHARD BRANCATISANO, JULIAN MCMAHON
AVAILABLE: (RENT/OWN) \$6.99 4.2GB (HD), \$5.99/\$24.99 1.1GB (SD)

'A tsunami just flipped the foodchain' is the tagline for this B horror movie, a joint venture between Australian and Singaporean cast and crew. The premise is that a bunch of impossibly pretty supermarket workers, their friends and some robbers are trapped inside a store after a freak wave dumped a few snap-happy sharks into aisle 2, right next to the tinned beans and corn. It's about as corny as a tin of the stuff, too, with

some heavy overacting and a few shock moments designed for cheap scares. Still, it has a certain charm and ends up being intentionally funny.

Verdict You know what you're going to get before the title screen: cheap scares, a few laughs and lots of blood.

6

PlayStation® Store

► TOP TEN
Movies on Demand

- 1 **Total Recall** Sony Pictures
- 2 **The Expendables 2** Roadshow Films
- 3 **The Bourne Legacy** Universal Pictures
- 4 **The Campaign** Warner Bros.
- 5 **Ted** Universal Pictures
- 6 **The Dark Knight Rises** Warner Bros.
- 7 **Lockout** Roadshow Films
- 8 **A Thousand Words** Paramount
- 9 **The Amazing Spider-Man** Sony Pictures
- 10 **Brave** Disney

Now available to rent or own on PlayStation® Store

The PlayStation Network Video Store offers hundreds of titles available to rent or own at the click of a button!





Argo (M)

DIRECTOR: BEN AFFLECK **CAST:** BEN AFFLECK, BRIAN CRANSTON, ALAN ARKIN, JOHN GOODMAN
AVAILABLE ON: BLU-RAY/DVD

In 1978, radical militants stormed the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, taking the majority of its staff hostage in direct retaliation for the United States harbouring Iran's deposed Shah. Six staff managed to flee to the Canadian Embassy, and the C.I.A. pull out all the stops to covertly whisk them out of the country. The plan? Send in specialist Tony Mendez (Affleck) under the guise of a movie producer scouting locations for the next Hollywood blockbuster, passing off the escapees as members of the film's crew. Based on the Iran Hostage Crisis, with some obvious artistic license, Affleck again handles dual roles of lead and director brilliantly, balancing extremely tense moments with dark humour. Enthralling.

Watch this if you like *Syriana*

Verdict A rock solid addition to Affleck's portfolio, proving again he's far more bankable when directing.

9



Berserk Movie 1 - The Egg of the King (MA15+)

DIRECTOR: TOSHIYUKI KUBOOKA **CAST:** HIROAKI IWANAGA, TAKAHIRO SAKURAI, TOA YUKINARI, KENTA MIYAKE
AVAILABLE ON: BLU-RAY/DVD

It's not just big Hollywood flicks like Spider-Man and Hulk that are getting early reboots these days – several prominent anime franchises are getting do-overs, too. The new series of *Berserk* movies streamlines the plot of the original manga, but keeps the overall vibe: a tale of bromance and war in an epic fantasy world. Unlike most medieval-themed anime shows, *Berserk* presents a realistic take on the era, an impoverished and superstitious time when life was nasty, brutal, and short. Cel-shaded CGI is used extensively to render cavalry charges, massed infantry battles, and the gory rampages of the protagonist, a moody loner called 'Guts.'

Watch this if you like: *Conan*, *Game of Thrones*

Verdict Armies of knights battle until they're knee-deep in gibs. This is what it's all about, folks.

9



Killing Them Softly (MA15+)

DIRECTOR: ANDREW DOMINIK **CAST:** BRAD PITT, SCOTT MCNAIRY, BEN MENDELSOHN, JAMES GANDOLFINI, RICHARD JENKINS, RAY LIOTTA
AVAILABLE ON: BLU-RAY/DVD

After three incompetent low-level criminals rob a high-stakes card game, local enforcer Jackie Cogan (Pitt) is brought in to get the money back and 'clean' up the mess. Interspersed between the intense violence and softer, more poignant moments comes a steady stream of commentary via radios or televisions in the background on the U.S. economic crisis providing an arcing metaphor throughout the course of the film. Pitt is in his element as Cogan, both subtle and uncompromisingly brutal. His scenes with fellow hitman Mickey are wonderfully awkward, bringing out a nuanced and beautifully broken performance from James Gandolfini.

Watch this if you like *Natural Born Killers*

Verdict Gritty and layered with a unique visual style and top-notch cast. Well worth a look.

8



Hellsing Ultimate Collection (Eps1-4) (MA15+)

DIRECTOR: TOMOKAZU TOKORO **CAST:** FUMIKO ORIKASA, JOUJI NAKATA, NOBUO TOBITA, NORIO WAKAMOTO, YOSHIKO SAKAKIBARA
AVAILABLE ON: BLU-RAY/DVD

Another well-implemented anime remake. The '90s version of *Hellsing* was both apocryphal and abysmal, but this new series of 45-minute eps is both true to the original manga and glorious to behold. *Hellsing Ultimate* is a spectacle – undead Nazis in zeppelins versus Alucard, a vampire bound to serve a top-secret SAS-style British demon-slaying special forces group. Alucard does not sparkle. He's more partial to transmogrifying into a jagged-edged shade full of staring eyeballs, slavering over necks as he gorges on blood, and ventilating his foes with jumbo automatic pistols. An orgy of psycho-sexual violence.

Watch this if you enjoyed: *Ninja Scroll*

Verdict No fruity *Twilight* nonsense here – blood, gore, and diabolical fun.

9



Justified: Season 3 (M)

DIRECTOR: VARIOUS **CAST:** TIMOTHY OLYPHANT, WALTON GOGGINS, NEAL MCDONOUGH, MYKELT WILLIAMSON
AVAILABLE ON: BLU-RAY/DVD

Elmore Leonard's modern-day Western continues with an explosive third season. After U.S. Marshall Raylan Givens (Olyphant) finally eliminates local Kentuckian criminal element, the Bennett clan, a new out-of-state adversary enters the fray. Exiled Mafioso Robert Quares starts ruffling feathers aiming to make a fast and bloody grab for cash. His brash actions put him directly in the sights of Boyd Crowder (Goggins), who doesn't take kindly to criminal enterprises he doesn't get a piece of. If that wasn't enough, the opportunistic Elliston Limehouse proves to be a contender. As the three factions square off, Raylan finds himself in the middle, using his badge and itchy trigger finger to keep the peace.

Watch this if you like *Deadwood*

Verdict Possibly the best season yet, filled with charismatic and entertaining characters.

8



A Monster in Paris (G)

DIRECTOR: BIBO BERGERON **CAST:** LUC BESSON, ADAM GOLDBERG, VANESSA PARADIS
AVAILABLE ON: DVD

Now here's a surprise: an animated movie from France with an accessible story, all-ages appeal, likeable characters, solid story structure, great lighting and animation, and an upbeat, whimsical sense of adventure. Set against a backdrop of Paris in 1910, it introduces us to two young dudes, a projectionist and an inventor, who accidentally create a giant mutant flea that terrorises the city. But it turns out that the flea is amiable and musically gifted, and the real monster is a crooked police chief with political ambitions, a man who'll stop at nothing to slay the flea, and anyone who tries to stop him... The disc doesn't include the original French dialogue track, but the English dub is great.

Watch this if you liked: *Ratatouille*, *Hugo*

Verdict Steampunk shenanigans, slapstick, vaudeville, romance, and high adventure.

8

► MUST SEE

Django Unchained

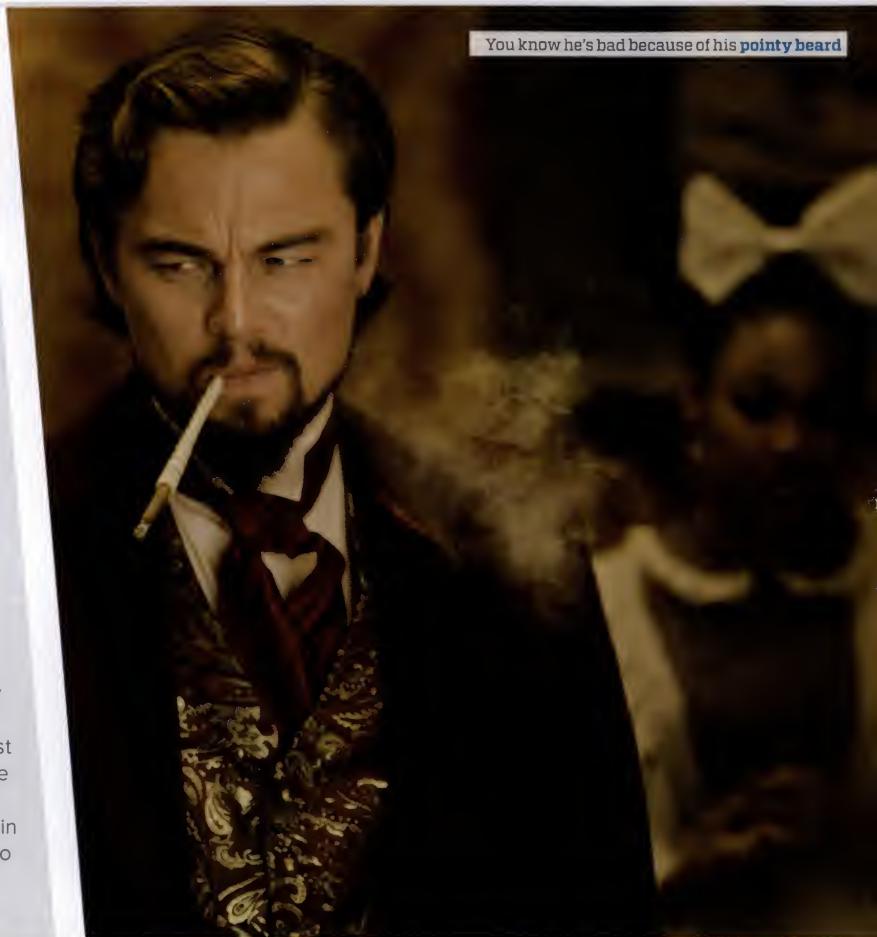
(MA15+)

DIRECTOR: QUENTIN TARANTINO **CAST:** JAMIE FOXX, CHRISTOPH WALTZ, LEONARDO DiCAPRIO, KERRY WASHINGTON, SAMUEL L. JACKSON **IN CINEMAS:** NOW

Daying homage to Sergio Leone's spaghetti Westerns, *Django Unchained* is a blood-soaked tale of revenge with Tarantino's trademark quirky and often horrendously violent flair. Django (Foxx), a slave being taken across country, crosses paths with German bounty hunter Dr. King Schultz (Waltz), and his life is changed forever.

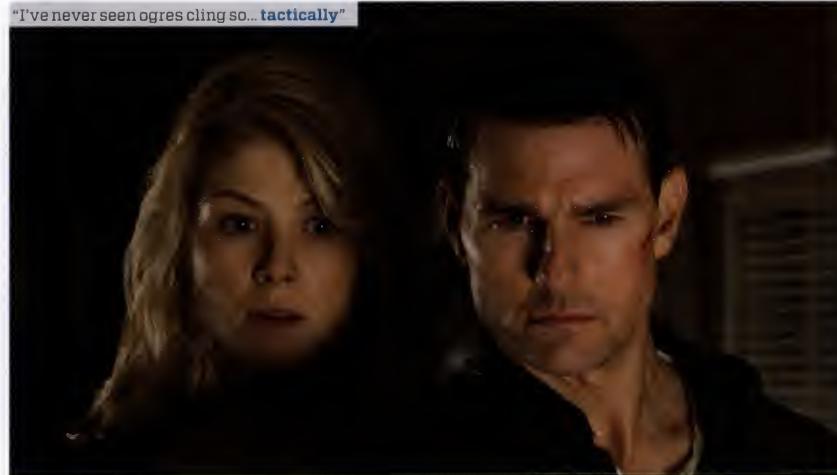
Freed from the shackles of slavery, Django and Schultz come to an accord. They'll partner up for the Winter chasing down bounties to make their fortune and once the thaw melts turn their attention to finding Django's missing wife. So the rambunctious rascallions set off leaving a swath of bloodied bodies in their wake. Once Spring has sprung they discover Django's true love has been sold to cruel plantation owner Calvin Candie (DiCaprio) and begin hatching a scheme to set her free.

While the entire cast does an excellent job Foxx and Waltz are clearly standouts. Foxx's proud and beautifully restrained Django is perfectly countered by Waltz's eminently charming and unbelievably likable Schultz. They are absolutely magnetic on screen together. The pacing of the first half of the film is extremely tight, loosening considerably in the second with some eccentric Tarantino tangents taking hold, particularly a strange Australian twist almost forcibly inserted in the final act. That said, *Django Unchained* is a definite return to form for Tarantino and easily the best film he's done in years.



You know he's bad because of his **pointy beard**

"I've never seen ogres cling so... tactically"

**Jack Reacher**

(M)

DIRECTOR: CHRISTOPHER MCQUARRIE **CAST:** TOM CRUISE, ROSAMUND PIKE, RICHARD JENKINS, WERNER HERZOG, ROBERT DUVALL **IN CINEMAS:** NOW

Tom Cruise plays Jack Reacher, a brutal no-nonsense military investigator living life off the grid. Drawn back due to a gruesome mass murder committed by an ex-military sniper he's more than familiar with, James Barr, Reacher begins to uncover a larger conspiracy at play – and finds himself directly in the firing line.

Director Christopher McQuarrie has made some bold choices in *Jack Reacher*. Some work rather well and others not so much. Cruise does a fantastic job as Reacher; with his eye trained on all the angles he's got answers to questions you haven't even thought of yet. The brutal

and debilitating hand-to-hand combat is refreshing, evoking the same sort of well-trained precision Val Kilmer exhibited in *Spartan*.

The supporting cast doesn't fare nearly as well with Werner Herzog's menacing role as antagonist The Zec proving to be a highlight. The usually solid Rosamund Pike brings very little to her role as Barr's attorney other than an unrequited love interest for Reacher, and Robert Duvall seems thrown in for the sake of it.

Jack Reacher ticks all the right boxes but comes apart at the seams as it draws to a close.

**Gangster Squad**

(MA15+)

DIRECTOR: RUBEN FLEISCHER **CAST:** JOSH BROLIN, SEAN PENN, RYAN GOSLING, EMMA STONE, GIOVANNI RIBISI, ROBERT PATRICK, NICK NOLTE **IN CINEMAS:** NOW

While Ruben Fleischer's debut *Zombieland* delivered a fresh take on the genre, his follow-ups have been steadily going downhill. *30 Minutes or Less* failed to capture an audience and while *Gangster Squad* has an impressive cast and is often visually spectacular, there's little to it.

Inspired by events in 1940s Los Angeles it details a secret 'off the books' squad commissioned to dismantle brutal kingpin Mickey Cohen's (Penn) rapidly expanding empire. Incorruptible hard-arse Sgt. John O'Mara (Brolin) is charged with recruiting and leading this merry band of misfits. The crew is made up of the usual fare: a smooth talker (Gosling), the brains (Ribisi), a gunslinger (Patrick) and a few diverse choices to round out the team.

Unfortunately, *Gangster Squad* suffers from a wafer thin plot and profound lack of chemistry between everyone involved. It seems happy to merely jump from set piece to set-piece with no character development at all, hoping to wow the audience with how pretty and violent it is. A textbook example of style over substance.

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Release Schedule

Release dates, pre-order deals, new information and much more

FEB 2013

Dead Space 3
Genre: Action Distributor: EA
Date: Feb 7

Aliens: Colonial Marines
Genre: Action Distributor: Five Star Games Date: Feb 12



Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance
Genre: Action Distributor: Mindscape Date: Feb 21



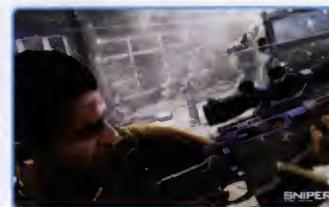
Crysis 3
Genre: Shooter Distributor: EA
Date: Feb 21

Fist of the North Star: Ken's Rage 2
Genre: Fighting Distributor: TBA
Date: TBA Feb

MARCH 2013

PRE-ORDER Tomb Raider
Genre: Action-Adventure Distributor: Namco Bandai Partners Date: Mar 5

God of War: Ascension
Genre: Action Distributor: Sony Date: Mar 14



PRE-ORDER Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2
Genre: Shooter Distributor: QVS Date: Mar 15

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 14
Genre: Sports Distributor: EA Date: Mar 28

BioShock Infinite
Genre: Shooter Distributor: 2K Games Date: Mar 26



► COLLECTOR'S EDITION

Tomb Raider

Step into the dark origin story of Lara Croft after she shipwrecks on a mysterious island populated by vicious natives and exotic ecosystems. But be prepared to hunt for your food and scavenge for equipment as she grows into the sexy treasure hunter we all know and love.



The Collector's Edition Includes:

- Lara Croft figurine 8-inches
- Double sided island map and poster 15 x 19
- Survival tin
- Art of Tomb Raider 4.6 x 7.5 inch book
- Survival pouch 4 x 6 inch
- Weapon pack DLC
- 10-track score

EB Games \$138 Estimated dispatch date: 5/3/13

► COLLECTOR'S EDITION

Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2

Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2 takes the bulls-eye precision of its best-selling predecessor to new and exciting heights. Powered by the CryENGINE 3 engine, you once again step into the ghilliesuit of a special ops sniper to take down the enemy.

The Collector's Edition Includes:

- SteelBook copy of *Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2*
- Artbook with never-before-published illustrations
- Sniper tactics and history fanbook, developed in collaboration with military experts with combat experience
- Official soundtrack
- Bonus DLC including sniper rifles and four playable characters



EB Games \$98 JB Hi-Fi \$89 Estimated dispatch date: 15/3/13



Young Justice: Legacy
Genre: Sports Distributor: EA
Date: TBA Mar

Star Trek
Genre: Action Distributor: Namco Bandai Partners Date: TBA Mar

APRIL 2013

Dead Island: Riptide
Genre: Shooter/RPG Distributor: AIE Date: Apr 23



Injustice: Gods Among Us
Genre: Fighting Distributor: Warner Bros. Date: TBA Apr

MAY 2013

The Last of Us
Genre: Action-Adventure Distributor: Sony Date: TBA May 7

Remember Me

Genre: Action-Adventure
Distributor: Capcom **Date:** TBA May

TBA 2013**Grand Theft Auto V**

Genre: Action **Distributor:** Rockstar
Date: TBA 2013

GRID 2

Genre: Racing **Distributor:** Namco
 Bandai Partners **Date:** TBA 2013

The Last Guardian

Genre: Adventure **Distributor:** Sony
Date: TBA 2013

Lost Planet 3

Genre: Action **Distributor:** THQ
Date: TBA 2013

Dust 514

Genre: Shooter **Distributor:** TBA
Date: TBA 2013

Brothers in Arms Furious 4

Genre: Shooter **Distributor:** Ubisoft
Date: TBA 2013

Doom 4

Genre: Shooter **Distributor:** TBC
Date: TBA 2013

**Arcania: Gothic 4**

Genre: RPG **Distributor:** TBA
Date: TBA 2013

Beyond: Two Souls

Genre: Adventure **Distributor:** Sony
Date: TBA 2013

Dragonball Z Budokai HD Collection

Genre: Action **Distributor:** Namco
 Bandai Partners **Date:** TBA 2013

Prey 2

Genre: Shooter **Distributor:** AIE
Date: TBA 2013

Deadpool

Genre: Action **Distributor:** Activision
Date: TBA 2013

Watch Dogs

Genre: Action **Distributor:** Ubisoft
Date: TBA 2013

Star Wars 1313

Genre: Action **Distributor:** Activision
Date: TBA 2013

Agent

Genre: Action **Distributor:** Rockstar
Date: TBA 2013

Dragon's Crown

Genre: Action **Distributor:** TBA **Date:**
 TBA 2013

Final Fantasy Versus XIII

Genre: RPG **Distributor:** Namco
 Bandai Partners **Date:** TBA 2013

Persona 4: Arena

Genre: Fighting **Distributor:** TBA
Date: TBA 2013

**Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII**

Genre: RPG **Distributor:** Namco
 Bandai Partners **Date:** TBA 2013

Tales of Xillia

Genre: RPG **Distributor:** TBA **Date:**
 TBA 2013

Castlevania: Lords of Shadow 2

Genre: Action-Adventure **Distributor:**
 Mindscape **Date:** TBA 2013

Rainbow Six: Patriots

Genre: Shooter **Distributor:** Ubisoft
Date: TBA 2013

Devil's Third

Genre: Action **Distributor:** TBA **Date:**
 TBA 2013

Warrior's Lair

Genre: Action-RPG **Distributor:** TBA
Date: TBA 2013

Serious Sam: BFE

Genre: Shooter **Distributor:** TBA
Date: TBA 2013

Final Fantasy XIV Online

Genre: RPG **Distributor:** Namco
 Bandai Partners **Date:** TBA 2013

Backbreaker Vengeance

Genre: Sports **Distributor:** TBA **Date:**
 TBA 2013

Dark Souls II

Genre: Action **Distributor:** Namco
 Bandai Partners **Date:** TBA 2013

**LEGO Marvel Super Heroes**

Genre: Action **Distributor:** Warner
 Bros. **Date:** TBA 2013

AMC's The Walking Dead: Survival Instinct

Genre: Sports **Distributor:** EA
Date: TBA 2013

PS Vita Releases

PS VITA
 PlayStation Vita

FEB 2013**Persona 4: Golden**

Genre: RPG **Distributor:** Namco
 Bandai Partners **Date:** February 22

Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time

Genre: Platformer **Distributor:** Sony
Date: TBA Feb

TBA 2013**Dead or Alive 5 Plus**

Genre: Fighter **Distributor:**
 Mindscape **Date:** TBA 2013

Dust 514

Genre: Shooter **Distributor:** Sony
Date: TBA 2013

Final Fantasy X

Genre: RPG **Distributor:** Square-
 Enix **Date:** TBA 2013

Killzone: Mercenary

Genre: Shooter **Distributor:** Sony
Date: TBA 2013

Zone of the Enders HD Collection

Genre: Action **Distributor:**
 Mindscape **Date:** TBA 2013

Rugby Challenge

Genre: Sports **Distributor:** TBA
Date: TBA 2013

Castlevania Mirror of Fate

Genre: Action-Adventure
Distributor: Konami **Date:** TBA 2013

When Vikings Attack!

Genre: Action **Distributor:** Sony
Date: TBA 2013

**Phantasy Star Online 2**

Genre: RPG **Distributor:** TBA **Date:**
 TBA 2013

Tearaway

Genre: Platformer **Distributor:** Sony
Date: TBA 2013

**Soul Sacrifice**

Genre: Action **Distributor:** Sony
Date: TBA 2013

Dragon's Crown

Genre: Action **Distributor:** Namco
 Bandai Partners **Date:** TBA 2013

**SPECIAL EDITIONS****Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Storm 3****The Will of Fire (pictured) and True Despair editions include:**

- 16cm-tall figurine from Banpresto
- A2 double sided Will of Fire (or True Despair) Edition poster
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- Game Soundtrack
- 5 Exclusive costumes DLC
- Exclusive Goku costume DLC

The *Naruto Shippuden Ultimate Ninja Storm* series is back in 2013, celebrating the return of highly awaited boss battles and welcoming

brand new features to revamp the game experience. Introducing masked Man and Nine-Tails assault on the Leaf Village for the first time in a videogame, the story mode will let you live the most recent events of the anime with a degree of faithfulness never-before-seen. More immersive, more faithful and more extreme, *Naruto Shippuden Ultimate Ninja Storm 3* will offer the most epic *Naruto* experience ever seen!

EB Games \$108 Estimated dispatch date: 7/3/13

index

ACTION

Alien Breed 3: Descent
TEAM 17
Top-down twin-stick affair that doesn't do enough to improve upon its predecessors.

Armored Core V
FROM SOFTWARE
Repetitive and needlessly complex.

Army of Two: The 40th Day
EA MONTREAL
Still bone-headed but a lot tighter and more fun than the original *Army of Two*.

Asura's Wrath
CYBERCONNECT 2
There's not much game here and it's packed with QTEs. Bleh.

RECOMMENDED Bayonetta
PLATINUM GAMES
It takes balls to make a game this violent, sexy and weird.

RECOMMENDED Beyond Good & Evil HD
UBISOFT
Still one of the most charming games ever.

NEW Big Sky Infinity
BOSS BADDIE
A poorly thought-out twin-stick shooter. Looks alright, plays better on PS Vita.

Binary Domain
YAKUZA STUDIO
Cool ideas, embarrassing dialogue.

RECOMMENDED BloodRayne: Betrayal
WAY FORWARD
A classy and colourful beat-'em-up that rewards exploration.

BreakQuest: Extra Evolution
BEATSHAPES
Tries to break the brick-breaking formula but suffers from plodding gameplay.

RECOMMENDED Castle Crashers
THE BEHEMOTH
Violent but classy side-scrolling cartoon RPG-action. Best played in co-op.

RECOMMENDED Child of Eden
Q ENTERTAINMENT
You need a Move controller to wring the best out of this weird and wonderful blaster.

The Club
BIZARRE CREATIONS
Original, compulsive and fun.

RECOMMENDED Dead Rising 2: Off The Record
CAPCOM VANCOUVER
If you missed it first time around, grab it now.

Devil May Cry HD Collection
CAPCOM
A bit lazy. 720p gameplay, low-res cutscenes.

Devil May Cry 4
CAPCOM
Memorable bosses but prepare to backtrack.

NEW RECOMMENDED DmC: Devil May Cry
NINJA THEORY
Makes the original seem cringeworthy by comparison. Remarkable and frantic.

RECOMMENDED Double Dragon
Neon
WAY FORWARD
Scott Pilgrim does it better.

Earth Defense Force: Insect Armageddon
VICTIOUS CYCLE SOFTWARE
Ugly, repetitive and about 10 years out of date.

El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron
VICTIOUS CYCLE SOFTWARE
Breathtakingly beautiful and inventive.

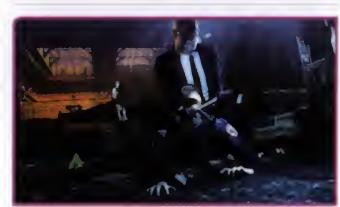
RECOMMENDED The Expendables 2 Videogame
ZOOTFLY
A disaster from start to finish. Booooooring.

RECOMMENDED Final Fight: Double Impact
PROPER GAMES
Forget about *Magic Sword*, play *Final Fight*.

RECOMMENDED Galaga Legions DX
NAMCO BANDAI PARTNERS
Bullet hell made pretty.

RECOMMENDED Ghostbusters: The Video Game
TERMINAL REALITY / THREEWAVE SOFTWARE
Robust, charming and impeccably presented.

Heavy Fire: Afghanistan
MASTIFF
A technical travesty. Full of brown.



Hitman: Absolution
DEVELOPER: IO INTERACTIVE
DISTRIBUTOR: NAMCO BANDAI PARTNERS
PLAYERS: 1

"Cleverly balances stealth and action for both newbies and long-time fans, while the narrative challenges even the most pacifistic player to pull the trigger."

RECOMMENDED House of the Dead: Overkill - Extended Cut
HEADSTRONG GAMES
Has its tongue so far in its cheek it's almost poking out the other side. Requires Move.

Hunted: The Demon's Forge
IXNILE
A textbook example of 'alright'. Co-op rules.

ESSENTIAL Jetpack Joyride
HALFBRICK / BEATSHAPES
Insanely addictive and an instant buy if you haven't played it on smartphones already.

ESSENTIAL Just Cause 2
AVALANCHE STUDIOS
Parachutes. Grappling hooks. Stripper zeppelins. An insane action game.

Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days
IO INTERACTIVE
Clever visuals, dull game.

Metacretin: radical hatred of the games you like

Website: metacritic.com Game: *DmC* Reviewer: ExclusiveGamer Score: 0

This game is the saddest piece of crap I've ever come across. The combat is flawed by trying to be "fast paced" but has constant slow motion time every time you "evade" an attack which only slows down the game flow a lot. And the writing is the worst thing I've seen since a bad Google translation. The profane unintelligent, unfunny, uncatchy, unwitty writing is the main reason this game fails. It sounds like a twelve-year-old wrote the script.



ABOUT THE INDEX

Check out our handy index of all the PS3 and PSV titles we feel you should play (and some you shouldn't). Please note: scores are a reflection of a game's comparative quality at the time of release and will not change - but the index may be updated as titles age or are superseded by new games.



Retro City Rampage

DEVELOPER: VBLANK ENTERTAINMENT
DISTRIBUTOR: VBLANK ENTERTAINMENT
PLAYERS: 1

"A fiendish send-up of *GTA* with more references than you can poke a DeLorean at. Challenging, tight, addictive - and it works on both PS3 and PS Vita."

RECOMMENDED Saints Row 3
VOLITION, INC.
Big, brash and unapologetically dumb fun.

Scott Pilgrim vs. the World
UBISOFT
Distinctly old-school. Needs co-op partners.

Shank 2
KLEI ENTERTAINMENT
Better combat but disappointing graphics compared to the original. Still cool, though.

RECOMMENDED Prototype 2
RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT
Dumb plot, fantastic gory action. Loads of fun.

Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One
INSONMIAC GAMES
Chaotic and confusing with four players, and a bit dull in single player.

Red Faction: Armageddon
VOLITION, INC.
Brown, corridor-based action that will leave you snoring. Get *Guerrilla* instead.

RECOMMENDED Red Faction: Guerrilla
VOLITION, INC.

The best destruction effects ever, hands down, with loads to see and do.

RECOMMENDED Renegade Ops
AVALANCHE STUDIOS
A sleek twin-stick shooter with split screen!

Resident Evil: The Darkside Chronicles
CAPCOM
On-rails lightgun rehash of *Resi 2* with bits of *Iore* thrown in. The too-shaky camera sucks.

RECOMMENDED Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles
CAPCOM
Better camera and broader subject matter that includes *Resi 0*. Uses Move.

Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City
SLANTSIX GAMES
Buggy in single player, but gets better online with mates. Unresponsive and ugly at times.

RECOMMENDED SOCOM: Special Forces
ZIPPER INTERACTIVE
Great online with Move and a Sharp Shooter.

Spec Ops: The Line
YAGER
Tries to depict the horrors of war but fails. Gets better just before the credits roll.

RECOMMENDED Starhawk
SANTA MONICA STUDIO
Addictive multi, more than competent splitscreen. Buy it.

RECOMMENDED Transformers: Fall of Cybertron
HIGH MOON STUDIOS
This is a must-get for fans. Two steps forward and one step back from *War for Cybertron*.

RECOMMENDED Vanquish
PLATINUM GAMES
Whip quick third-person thrills. Play it now.

Velocity
FUTURLAB
A hypnotic racing-puzzler-shoot-'em-up and it's less than \$10. Challenging and stylish.

Wonderbook: Book of Spells
SONY
One part readalong, one part Move-wagglefest with a Hogwarts flavour.

Zone of the Enders HD Collection 7
KONAMI
Kojima's mechs-and-melodrama duo are all dolled up but still feels thin.

ACTION-ADVENTURE

3D Dot Game Heroes 7
FROM SOFTWARE
If you pine for the past you'll feel like this was made just for you.

Alice: Madness Returns 7
SPICY HORSE
Marries great ideas with average platforming.

The Amazing Spider-Man 7
BENNOX
Rips off *Arkham City* but lacks the depth.

RECOMMENDED Assassin's Creed Revelations 8
UBISOFT MONTREAL
Feels more like a (really big) expansion than a true sequel. *Brotherhood* is better.

RECOMMENDED Assassin's Creed III 9
UBISOFT MONTREAL
Looks better and is more ambitious than its predecessors with only a few niggles.

RECOMMENDED Batman: Arkham Asylum 8
ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS
Really delivers the goods, and even though the sequel's out you need this too.



Batman: Arkham City 10
DEVELOPER: ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS
PUBLISHER: WARNER BROS. PLAYERS: 1
"Everyone else needs to take note: this is how a superhero game should make you feel. It's endlessly creative, perfectly moody and technically flawless."

Blades of Time 4
GAINJIN ENTERTAINMENT
Simplistic combat, stupid AI, woeful levels.

RECOMMENDED Brütal Legend 9
DOUBLE FINE PRODUCTIONS
Must play, though the RTS bits are a bit crap.

RECOMMENDED Castlevania: Lords of Shadow 9
MERCURY STEAM
A truly solid romp with tasty combat.

Datura 6
SANTA MONICA STUDIOS
A proof-of-concept Move title that's little more than cobbled-together puzzles. Clunky.

RECOMMENDED Dead Island 8
TECHLAND
Bogus script and ugly but undeniably fun.

RECOMMENDED Dead Space 9
EA REDWOOD SHORES
Super tense. Modern, survival horror.

RECOMMENDED Dead Space 2 9
VISCERAL GAMES
What it loses in isolation it makes up for in storytelling. Still scary.

RECOMMENDED Enslaved 8
NINJA THEORY
A fun platforming romp based on the same classic story as TV's *Monkey*.

ESSENTIAL God of War III 10
SCE SANTA MONICA STUDIO
A showcase. Old-fashioned arse-kicking.

RECOMMENDED God of War Collection 9
SCE SANTA MONICA STUDIO/BLUEPOINT GAMES
Age has not diminished the impact of these PS2 titles. A must-get.

RECOMMENDED God of War Collection Volume II 8
READY AT DAWN
Meticulously updated and pretty to look at.

ESSENTIAL Grand Theft Auto IV 10
ROCKSTAR NORTH
The scope and scale of GTAIV is remarkable.

ESSENTIAL Grand Theft Auto: Episodes from Liberty City 9
ROCKSTAR NORTH
Two new single-player campaigns, expanded multiplayer and an explosive shotgun? Yes.

Hydrophobia: Prophecy 5
DARK ENERGY DIGITAL
Shoddy game, great water tech.

RECOMMENDED I Am Alive 9
UBISOFT
The game that was retail but now PSN only is dark, constantly tense and very satisfying.

RECOMMENDED inFAMOUS 2 9
SUCKER PUNCH PRODUCTIONS
Bigger and better, and the level editor is solid.

RECOMMENDED LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes 8
TRAVELLER'S TALES
While its predecessor felt old this feels fresh.

LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7 7
TRAVELLER'S TALES
You'd have to be a fan to get this and 1-4

RECOMMENDED LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures 9
TRAVELLER'S TALES
A joyous adaptation; one of the best.

RECOMMENDED LEGO Lord of the Rings 8
TRAVELLER'S TALES
A solid and rather large LEGO outing. Expertly weaves in bits from the films.

Majin and the Forsaken Kingdom 7
GAME REPUBLIC
A feel-good romp that's a little old-fashioned.

Mafia II 8
2K CZECH
Great when it's on fire but the world feels empty. Has been well and truly bested.

RECOMMENDED Max Payne 3 8
ROCKSTAR
A riveting rollercoaster where each gunfight is a ballet of bullets. Superbly atmospheric.

ESSENTIAL Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots 10
KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS
Yes, it's as much a movie as it is a game but the production values are insane.

RECOMMENDED Metal Gear Solid HD Collection 9
KONAMI
MGS2 has aged, *Snake Eater* is still all class and *Peace Walker* rocks.

Ninja Gaiden 3 7
TEAM NINJA
Mind you don't impale yourself on the difficulty spike. Fans will lap it up.

RECOMMENDED Okami HD 8
CAPCOM
Got 40 hours spare? Get this. It's absolutely beautiful and has aged spectacularly well.

Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands 8
UBISOFT MONTREAL
Harks back to the original Prince. You've been here before and the world's moved on.

RECOMMENDED Ratchet & Clank Future: A Crack in Time 9
INSOUMNIAC GAMES
Reinvigorates the genre without reinventing the wheel.

RECOMMENDED Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction 8
INSOUMNIAC GAMES
A big, wild, good ol' fashioned adventure.

ESSENTIAL Red Dead Redemption 10
ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO
A sweeping epic. Grab the Game of the Year edition for maximum value.

RECOMMENDED Resident Evil 4 8
CAPCOM
A straight port and not as pretty as it was, but it's still great.

RECOMMENDED Resident Evil 5 9
CAPCOM
A grand, bloody adventure but the inventory system remains bad.

RECOMMENDED Resident Evil 6 8
CAPCOM
Starts out slow and then ramps up. Worth buying for Mercenaries mode.

RECOMMENDED The Saboteur 8
PANDEMIC STUDIOS
Charming and packed with action. Great, unique visual style.

Shadows of the Damned 7
GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE
Full of dick jokes and so-so gameplay from two geniuses of design. A real shame.

Silent Hill: Downpour 7
VATRA GAMES
True to the pants-browning original, but technical problems and stupid AI tarnish it.

Silent Hill HD Collection 7
KONAMI
True evil never dies; it gets a decent facelift.

Sorcery 7
THE WORKSHOP
A genuinely fun Move title geared towards kids. Fun, lively tone with wink-wink writing.

RECOMMENDED Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Double Agent 9
UBISOFT SHANGHAI
Obsessive and gripping, online and off.

ESSENTIAL Uncharted 2: Among Thieves 10
NAUGHTY DOG
This is the reason Hollywood is so worried about videogames.



Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception 10
DEVELOPER: NAUGHTY DOG
PUBLISHER: SONY PLAYERS: 1-12
"Impeccable in every regard. The action ramps up and up, taking you on foot-chases to teeth-gritting firefights and beyond to stunning set pieces. Totally complements and enhances the other games in the series."

RECOMMENDED Yakuza 4 8
CS1 TEAM
One for the fans, but it's very refreshing.

ADVENTURE

The Adventures of Tintin: The Secret of the Unicorn 6
UBISOFT MONTPELLIER
You'll get a kick out of co-op.

RECOMMENDED Back to the Future: The Game Episode 1 8
TELLTALE GAMES
Fairly simple puzzles but, Great Scott, it looks and feels amazing.

RECOMMENDED Heavy Rain 8
QUANTIC DREAM
Not quite a revolution but very clever and very well-crafted.

Journey 9
THATGAMECOMPANY
Stunningly realised. A game unlike any other and perhaps the friendliest multiplayer.

THE BEST PSone CLASSICS ON PlayStation® Store



FINAL FANTASY VII
DEVELOPER: SQUARE
PLAYERS: 1
The RPG upon which all other RPGs are generally judged, *Final Fantasy VII* is a modern classic and a worthy part of every credible videogame library.



DRIVER
DEVELOPER: REFLECTIONS
INTERACTIVE PLAYERS: 1
The original *Driver* hit PlayStation like a blast of fresh air. Hectic car chases through cities may be old-hat now but when *Driver* debuted it was like nothing we'd seen.



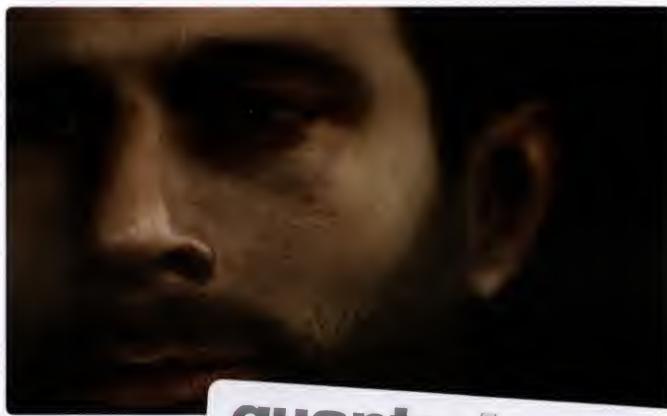
CRASH BANDICOOT 3: WARPED
DEVELOPER: NAUGHTY DOG
PLAYERS: 1
The best platformer on any PlayStation. As far as old-school run and jump action in purpose-built levels goes, this is the zenith.



SYPHON FILTER
DEVELOPER: EIDETIC
PLAYERS: 1
If you still think *Syphon Filter* was a *MGS* rip-off you're misled. Play it again and tell us this awesome series doesn't deserve a PS3 comeback.



MEDIEVIL
DEVELOPER: SCE STUDIO
CAMBRIDGE PLAYERS: 1
Speaking of games that deserve a PS3 comeback, where's Sir Dan? Fantasy hack 'n slash meets the supernatural, *MediEvil* still does it better than most since.



inhouse

FEATURED STUDIO OF THE MONTH

quanticdream

Quantic Dream

LOCATION: PARIS, FRANCE FOUNDED: 1997

BEST KNOWN FOR: HEAVY RAIN

In the mid '90s, novelist David Cage was keen to adapt one of his written works *Omkron – The Nomad Soul* into a video game so took the next logical step, and founded the development studio Quantic Dream. After making *Omkron* for the PC and Dreamcast the studio lent a hand to the 2004 film *Immortal*, an animated sci-fi which blended live actors with computer generated surroundings. His next work appeared on the PlayStation 2, remembered as either *Fahrenheit* locally or as *Indigo Prophecy* in the United States. *Fahrenheit* received numerous awards for its (then) unique interactive storytelling.

With critical success under its belt, QD increased its numbers for the PlayStation 3 exclusive *Heavy Rain* to 110 employees. Categorised by many as more of an interactive movie than video game, it nevertheless enjoyed a critical reception, scoring a Game of the Year award from CNN and industry recognition for its story and technical innovation. Of the three million or so people who have played *Heavy Rain*, roughly 75% have finished it (the industry average for completed video games is 20 - 25%). A movie adaptation is also in the works with Warner Bros.

Cage is regarded by many as an industry visionary for his innovative

techniques and emotionally immersive stories. "Games always explore the same things," said Cage in an interview with British newspaper *The Guardian*. "They're about being powerful, being the good guys against the bad guys – that's a very tiny part of what can be done. There are so many other stories to tell, so many other emotions to trigger." Just last year he claimed the "Industry would die if it doesn't try more to be innovative and to come up with new ideas."

It's not just a game development studio, however, as QD offers full motion capture support, shooting the body, voice and face at the same time. The technology was used in the short film *Kara* about an android who discovers she can think, and will be used in the upcoming PlayStation 3 exclusive *Beyond: Two Souls*, expanding the studio up to 180 employees.

Beyond: Two Souls features actress Ellen Page as a young woman connected to a paranormal entity and is expected to release later this year. "We want to continue to explore and take risks and be ambitious for our titles and maybe fail, but maybe succeed and discover something," said Cage in an interview with GameTrailers.

THE BEST PSP GAMES



GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY STORIES
DEVELOPER: ROCKSTAR LEEDS
PLAYERS: 1-6

This is about as remarkable as gaming gets on a handheld console. A fully-fledged 3D *GTA*, just like the PS2 versions, on PSP – and it feels absolutely brilliant. Also? Phil Collins is in it. Yes, we're totally serious.



MONSTER HUNTER FREEDOM UNITE
DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
PLAYERS: 1-4

Monster Hunter is a true system seller in its native Japan and it deserves that sort of awareness here. It's an adventure game to lose your life to, rewarding you in spades if you're able to put the effort in. Even better with mates.



WIPEOUT PULSE
DEVELOPER: SCE LIVERPOOL
PLAYERS: 1-8

Beautiful and weighted just right, it's a futurist's wet dream. There's a reason *WipEout* just works – and this is proof. Depending on which day of the week you ask us this just pips the likes of *Burnout Legends* and *Gran Turismo* for best racing game on PSP.



METAL GEAR SOLID: PEACE WALKER
DEVELOPER: KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS
PLAYERS: 1-6

A proper, well-produced and thought-out *Metal Gear*; this is a must-have. The story's great and the action is totally addictive. We can't stress it enough: buy this game, and a PSP if you must. This is a title that no gamer should miss.



GOD OF WAR: GHOST OF SPARTA
DEVELOPER: READY AT DAWN
PLAYERS: 1

Stupider better than the already excellent *Chains of Olympus*, this still has fantastic graphics and tighter-than-Hades gameplay. If you're a fan of the series, this is a crucial part of the saga you really shouldn't miss.

ESSENTIAL *L.A. Noire*

TEAM BONDI

Slow-paced, incredibly detailed and well-executed. Unlike anything else available.

RECOMMENDED *Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust*

TEAM17 SOFTWARE

An amazing new low for this generation. Not even 'so bad it's good', it's just awful.

RECOMMENDED *Stacking*

DOUBLE FINE

A truly unique concept and a real brain tickler.

RECOMMENDED *The Testament of Sherlock Holmes*

FROGWARES

Slow-paced and challenging, one for those who've always dreamt of being Holmes.

RECOMMENDED *The Walking Dead – Episode 5*

TELLTALE GAMES

Emotional and gripping storytelling – the whole series is astounding. Only available on the US PSN. Sorry.

FIGHTING

Anarchy Reigns

PLATINUM GAMES

Lots of potential, but it needs online players.

Dead or Alive 5

TEAM NINJA

A slick, beautiful mash of fighting polish and icky sleaze, but evolves into a frantic mess.

Deadliest Warrior: Ancient Combat

343 GAMES

Real people, ridiculous combat. Sun Tzu versus William Wallace? Sure!

Dragon Ball Z Budokai HD Collection

DIMPS

Budokai 3 is a highlight but this is archaic.

Marvel vs Capcom: Origins

CAPCOM/IRON GALAXY STUDIOS

Two old titles in one outdated and boring package. Yawn.

RECOMMENDED Mortal Kombat

NETHERREALM

A sterling, yet banned, return to form. Unless you live in NZ.

Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Storm Generations

CYBERCONNECT 2

Stunning animation, but the biffo is a chore.

PlayStation All-Stars Battle Royale

SUPERBOT ENTERTAINMENT

A reliable brawler but the lineup's lacking. It needed more big names – where's Snake, or Cloud?

RECOMMENDED Skullgirls

REVENGE LABS

Wacky and weird but you'll love it.

RECOMMENDED SoulCalibur V

NAMCO BANDAI

Great weapons-based combat for online play, but single player is a bit thin. IV still rocks.

10

RECOMMENDED *Street Fighter III – Third Strike Online Edition*

9

IRON GALAXY

Very different from IV and utterly brilliant.

RECOMMENDED *Street Fighter X Tekken*

9

CAPCOM

Ridiculously entertaining and well-made, but the DLC strategy blows.

Super Street Fighter IV Arcade Edition

8

CAPCOM

For first time purchasers only. You'll probably find this or SSFIV on the cheap somewhere.

RECOMMENDED *Tekken Tag Tournament 2*

8

NAMCO BANDAI PARTNERS

Innovative and challenging. Tonnes of characters, including a few newbies.

RECOMMENDED *Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3*

8

CAPCOM

Blinding action with a roster you deserve.

Virtua Fighter 5: Final Showdown

7

SEGA

Fast and clean, but the tasty extras are DLC.

WWE '13

6

YUKE'S/FUTURE MEDIA CREATORS

Comprehensively spoiled by sloppy controls. It hasn't improved much on last year, either.

FLIGHT

Ace Combat: Assault Horizon

7

PROJECT ACES

Reality-bending fare that lacks depth.

Apache: Air Assault

7

GAIJIN ENTERTAINMENT

Hardcore chopper sim with impressive detail but lacks variety. Good online, though.

RECOMMENDED *Birds of Steel*

8

GAIJIN ENTERTAINMENT

Hardcore stuff. The IL2 heritage shines through, but it's not as pretty as it once was.

Damage Inc. Pacific Squadron WWII

3

MAD CATZ

A comprehensive failure. Unimaginative, glitchy, and it looks terrible.

ESSENTIAL *IL-2 Sturmovik: Birds of Prey*

10

GAIJIN ENTERTAINMENT

Packed with little details across the board.

Jane's Advanced Strike Fighters

5

TRICKSTAR GAMES

Fifth-rate design and presentation.

RECOMMENDED *Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X. 2*

8

UBISOFT ROMANIA

Way better mission design over the first title and good variety too.

Top Gun: Hard Lock

4

HEADSTRONG GAMES

Limp and aimless. A trap laced with nostalgia that goes into a flat spin quickly.

MUSIC

AC/DC Live: Rock Band Track Pack
HARMONIX
Bare-bones stuff, but fully exportable.

RECOMMENDED The Beatles: Rock Band
HARMONIX
Outstanding. This is a tribute like no other.

RECOMMENDED DJ Hero 2
FREESTYLELEGAMES
Some great improvements and excellent mixes.

RECOMMENDED Green Day: Rock Band
HARMONIX
Very good. Up there with *The Beatles: Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero: Metallica*.

Guitar Hero 5
NEVERSOFT
The last in the series with a dud tracklist.

RECOMMENDED Guitar Hero: Metallica
NEVERSOFT
The best in the series since *Guitar Hero III*.

Guitar Hero: Warriors of Rock
NEVERSOFT
Functional, but it's missed the mark.

RECOMMENDED Just Dance 3
UBISOFT
You need PlayStation Move and a lot of enthusiasm to get the most out of this.

RECOMMENDED Just Dance 4
UBISOFT
As silly and fun as the last instalment.

LEGO Rock Band
HARMONIX/ TRAVELLER'S TALES
Cute. Fewer tracks than we'd like though.

PixelJunk 4am
Q GAMES
Move controls are poorly implemented. A pity.

RECOMMENDED Retro/Grade
24 CARET GAMES
A shooter-cum-rhythm game that's loaded with lasers.

RECOMMENDED Rock Band 3
HARMONIX
Improvements to the interface abound, but it's only as good as your existing DLC library.

Rock Band Blitz
HARMONIX
Once again an extensive library of *Rock Band* DLC will ensure you enjoy this.

RECOMMENDED Rocksmith
UBISOFT
More an educational tool than game, but it works really, really well.

SingStar
SCE LONDON STUDIO
Will last as long as the PS3 with so much DLC.

PARTY

Ape Escape
JAPAN STUDIO
A serious misstep. An on-rails shooter where the monkeys run towards you? Pass.

EyePet
SCE LONDON STUDIO
Harmless fun but pointless for adults.

Kung Fu Rider
JAPAN STUDIO
Waggle-tastic. A terrible Move game.

PlayStation Move Heroes
NIHILISTIC SOFTWARE
One for undemanding kids. Fun but bland.

Sports Champions 2
ZINDAGI GAMES
The original was a must-have. This isn't.

Start the Party! Save the World!
SUPERMASSIVE GAMES
A Move game for the very young.

Yoostar 2
BLITZ GAME STUDIOS
Imperfect yet hilarious movie karaoke title.

PUZZLE/PLATFORMER

Babel Rising
MANDO PRODUCTIONS
This tower-defence god-game has a spirited concept but winds up being soulless.

ESSENTIAL Braid
HOTHEAD GAMES
Probably the best-ever example of how to implement time-bending physics.

RECOMMENDED Catherine
ATLUS
Niche and weird in places, but compelling.

RECOMMENDED Chime
ZÖE MODE
A music-based puzzler where you need to slot in blocks to rockin' (and chilled) beats.

de Blob 2
BLUE TONGUE ENTERTAINMENT
Surprisingly fun, fresh and colourful. Get it if you can: Blue Tongue no longer exist.

Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two
JUNCTION POINT STUDIOS
Way better with Move and with two players, but it's a bit tricky for young 'uns.

Flight Control
FIREMINT
One of the best Move games ever.

Hell Yeah! Wrath of the Dead
Rabbit
ARKEDO
A fun cartoon journey packed with blood.

Jak & Daxter Trilogy
SONY
PS2 mascots prove they are evergreen. A truly fine HD makeover.

Joe Danger 2
HELLO GAMES
A platformer-puzzler with bundles of charm.

Katamari Forever
NAMCO BANDAI
Joyful, though the series is showing its age.



LittleBigPlanet 2

DEVELOPER: MEDIA MOLECULE PUBLISHER: SONY PLAYERS: 1-4

"A truly charming platformer. Incredibly innovative and never-ending; you could sink a lifetime into creating anything you want for this and never be done."

NIGHTS into Dreams HD
SEGA (SHANGHAI) SOFTWARE
A game from yesterday riddled with cracks.

RECOMMENDED Outland
HOUSEMARQUE
Liberally copies bits from old-school *Castlevania* but it does it well. Very clever.

Papo & Yo
MINORITY
Deep, affecting subject, but predictable and simple. Not cheap, either.

Pid
MIGHT AND DELIGHT
Frustrating and not much fun at all. You will swear... a lot.

RECOMMENDED Quantum Conundrum
AIRTIGHT GAMES
If you're expecting more *Portal*, stop. Very cool ideas marred by frustrating platforming.

RECOMMENDED The Ratchet & Clank Trilogy
INSOMNIAC/IDOLMINDS
Excellent value for money and still refined.

Leisure Suit Larry - this is not a joke

Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust is the only game in the history of *DPS* to ever earn a lowly score of 1. However, in May last year, a Kickstarter project eclipsed its funding target to bring the Lothario back in an old-fashioned point-and-click adventure, because that was the time when Larry was actually funny and not some worthless hack. It's on track to be released some time between now and late March, and *Larry* creator Al Lowe has also been involved with its development.



Gran Turismo 5

DEVELOPER: POLYPHONY DIGITAL PUBLISHER: SONY PLAYERS: 1-16

"*GT5* feels familiar, and is still an RPG masquerading as a racing game. It looks stunning with class-leading lighting effects and exceptionally modelled premium cars, and with a G27 wheel it feels incredible. We just wish that there were some more recent cars."

RECOMMENDED LittleBigPlanet Karting
UNITED FRONT GAMES
Easier than *ModNation* but more loaded with opportunity to create. Lots of fun.

Mad Riders
TECHLAND
Cheap ATV thrills in a crowded market.

RECOMMENDED ModNation Racers
UNITED FRONT GAMES
Creating is even more fun than racing.

MotoGP 10/11
MONUMENTAL GAMES
Dull presentation and crap controls wreck it.

MotorStorm: Pacific Rift
EVOLUTION STUDIOS
Boasts splitscreen but feels old.

MotorStorm Apocalypse
EVOLUTION STUDIOS
The new locale lacks a little charm but the racing is as fast and frantic as ever.

MX vs. ATV Alive
RAINBOW STUDIOS
A step backwards for a series that peaked on PS2 and has gotten lamer since.

MUD - FIM Motocross World Championship
BLACK BEAN GAMES
No-frills motocross racing.

RECOMMENDED Need for Speed Hot Pursuit
CRITERION GAMES
Smooth and truly beautiful arcade racing.

RECOMMENDED Need For Speed Most Wanted
CRITERION
A fantastic open-world racer that needs to be online. Great multiplayer too.

Nail'd
TECHLAND
Fun knockabout ATV arcade racer.

RECOMMENDED Race Driver: GRID
CODEMASTERS
A born-to-rage racing rebel. A bit old, but the only other racer to have Mount Panorama.

Ridge Racer Unbounded
BUGBEAR ENTERTAINMENT
Woeful drifting, infuriating track design. Such a pity.

SBK Generations
MILESTONE
Fairly similar to 2011 and X. Technical and lovely but it's comparatively ugly.

RECOMMENDED *SHIFT 2: Unleashed*
SLIGHTLY MAD STUDIOS
Frantic racing with plenty of depth.

Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed **7**
SUMO DIGITAL
Tracks are great, the rest is okay. Pick Sonic.

RECOMMENDED *Split/Second*
BLACK ROCK STUDIO
Challenges Burnout but needed to be sharper.

WRC 3 **6**
MILESTONE
Does the bare minimum. Stick with 2 or *DiRT*.

Wrecked: Revenge Revised **7**
SUPERSONIC SOFTWARE
Absolute must-have for local-multi.

RPG/ACTION RPG

Alpha Protocol **5**
OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT
Great concept, poor execution.

RECOMMENDED *Dissgaea 4: A Promise Unforgotten*
NIPPON ICHI SOFTWARE
Very familiar for fans but still exciting.

RECOMMENDED *Dark Souls*
FROM SOFTWARE
Brutally, stupidly, gloriously hard.

RECOMMENDED *Darksiders II*
VIGIL GAMES
Slicker, tougher and deeper than the first.

RECOMMENDED *Dragon Age II*
BIOWARE
A step forward and two back from Origins.

RECOMMENDED *Dragon's Dogma*
CAPCOM
A challenging and punishing action-RPG where 'action' isn't an afterthought.

ESSENTIAL *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* **10**
BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS
Book holidays; you will need 300+ hours to discover everything this offers.

RECOMMENDED *Fallout: New Vegas* **8**
OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT
A great ride but you've been on it before.

RECOMMENDED *Final Fantasy XIII-2* **8**
SQUARE ENIX
Better; more freedom but still clunky in places.

Hyperdimension Neptunia Mk2 **5**
IDEA FACTORY
A truly unnecessary sequel.

RECOMMENDED *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning*
38 STUDIOS/BIG HUGE GAMES
A patchwork of everything that's great.

NEW **RECOMMENDED** *Labyrinth Legends* **6**
CREATE STUDIOS
Deceivingly cutesy, tougher than a black box. Laced with unforgiving puzzles and battles.

The Lord of the Rings: War in the North **7**
SNOWBLIND STUDIOS
Repetitive combat. Best in co-op.

RECOMMENDED *Mass Effect* **8**
BIOWARE
Worth a purchase for its storytelling.

ESSENTIAL *Mass Effect 2* **10**
BIOWARE
Astonishingly rich combat-driven sci-fi.

ESSENTIAL *Mass Effect 3* **10**
BIOWARE
One-ups its impressive predecessor.

Mugen Souls **6**
COMPILE HEART
An uninspired JRPG with a dirty sense of humour. Technically woeful, too.

RECOMMENDED *Ni No Kuni* **9**
LEVEL 5
Big, beautiful and addictive. Buy it.

Of Orcs and Men **7**
CYANIDE
Unrefined but a bloody good effort compared to their *A Game of Thrones* cash-in.

Now this is a tribute



So, you've played *Borderlands 2* and you've found a NPC in Sanctuary who gives out some pretty rare and sweet loot. That is the digital representation of a *Borderlands* fan called Michael Mamaril, who passed away due to cancer at age 22. Mamaril, along with one of his friends Carlo, was a huge fan of the game, and so Carlo asked Gearbox to write a eulogy for him. The studio more than obliged, and put him in the game. "Sniff"

RECOMMENDED *R.A.W. - Realms of Ancient War* **4**
WIZARBOX
Rough and flavourless. Waves its fingers at RPG conventions and pays for it.

Risen 2 **5**
DEEP SILVER
A mess. Send it down to Davy Jones' Locker.

Tales of Graces f **7**
NAMCO BANDAI PARTNERS
Saccharine, yet enticing. Looks lovely.

Valkyria Chronicles **8**
SEGA WOW
Strategy/RPG heads should not miss this.

Way of the Samurai 4 **6**
ACQUIRE
Wacky and weird. Japanophiles will dig it.

Yakuza: Dead Souls **8**
SEGA
Sluggish and dated, like a zombie wearing flares.

SHOOTER

007 Legends **3**
EUROCOM
An incomprehensibly awful Bond game and a really shoddy shooter in general.

Aliens vs. Predator **9**
REBELLION DEVELOPMENTS
One of the best movie-inspired titles ever.

RECOMMENDED *Battlefield 3* **8**
DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE
Single player blows, multiplayer's awesome.

RECOMMENDED *Battlefield: Bad Company 2* **8**
DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE
A deeply dedicated online community but the single-player mischief of the original is M.I.A.

RECOMMENDED *BioShock* **8**
IRRATIONAL GAMES/2K MARIN
Grown-up gaming at its best.

RECOMMENDED *BioShock 2* **9**
2K MARIN/DIGITAL EXTREMES/2K AUSTRALIA
Combat has been spliced to near-perfection.



Borderlands 2 **9**
DEVELOPER: GEARBOX SOFTWARE
DISTRIBUTOR: 2K PLAYERS: 1-4

"Wild, clever and overflowing with clever nods and moments. More cohesive than its predecessor and addictive too, with loads of DLC you'll want to care about incoming. Rewards multiple playthroughs, especially in co-op."

Brink **7**
SPLASH DAMAGE
Runs a good online race. Faceplants as a solo experience.

RECOMMENDED *Brother's in Arms: Hell's Highway* **8**
GEARBOX SOFTWARE
The most authentic WWII shooter ever made.

Bulletstorm **7**
PEOPLE CAN FLY
Inventive but is best towards the end.

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3 **9**
INFINITY WARD
Still worth playing for Spec-Ops alone.

RECOMMENDED *Call of Duty: Black Ops II* **9**
TREYARCH
Reinvents the multiplayer formula and has the best solo campaign out of all CoDs.

RECOMMENDED *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* **8**
VALVE
The game from your misspent youth.

RECOMMENDED *Crysis 2* **9**
CRYTEK
Pretty and challenging. Tops the original.

RECOMMENDED *The Darkness II* **8**
DIGITAL EXTREMES
Gory, inventive, and fun, but pretty short. You need to play co-op for the full story, too.

RECOMMENDED *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* **8**
EIDOS MONTREAL
A flawed masterpiece that doesn't offer quite as much choice as you'd like.

RECOMMENDED *Dishonored* **8**
ARKANE STUDIOS
Anti-climatic, otherwise a bloody good romp.

DOOM 3 BFG Edition **6**
ID
It hasn't aged well. A relic with cobwebs.

Family Guy: Back to the Multiverse **6**
HEAVY IRON STUDIOS
Stay for the fanfare 'cos the game ain't good.

RECOMMENDED *Far Cry 3* **9**
UBISOFT MONTREAL
Absolutely the best in the series and a new benchmark for open world shooters.

F.E.A.R. 3 **6**
DAY1 STUDIOS
Capable but unspectacular. Also, not scary.

RECOMMENDED *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier* **8**
UBISOFT PARIS
Beautiful tech and pacing, brilliant co-op.

Killzone HD **5**
GUERILLA GAMES
Killzone before it was good. Easily missed.

RECOMMENDED *Killzone 3* **9**
GUERILLA GAMES
Epic firefights and an engrossing storyline.

Medal of Honor: Warfighter **5**
DANGER CLOSE
Old hat. Buggy solo, and lacklustre multi.

RECOMMENDED *Mirror's Edge* **8**
EA DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE
A true original and smartly designed.

RECOMMENDED *Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath* **8**
JUST ADD WATER
A fun mish-mash of platforming and shooting.

RECOMMENDED *Operation Flashpoint: Red River* **8**
CODEMASTERS
Fun solo, but co-op over the PSN is awesome.

RECOMMENDED *The Orange Box* **9**
EA UK / VALVE
Get it for *Portal*, keep it for *Half-Life 2*.

RECOMMENDED *Portal 2*
VALVE

One of the most brilliant games, ever.

RAGE

ID
Holds promise but the world feels empty.

RECOMMENDED *Resistance 3*
INSOMNIAC GAMES

Derivative action but effortlessly compelling.

Rogue Warrior

ZOMBIE STUDIOS / REBELLION DEVELOPMENTS
A fiasco. The best bit is the end credits.

RECOMMENDED *Syndicate*
STARBREEZE STUDIOS

Stylish, and bountiful in co-op. Banned in Aus.

RECOMMENDED *Twisted Metal*
EAT SLEEP PLAY

Fast, refreshing and tactical. Great online.

SPORTS

AFL Live

BIG ANT
Does a decent job of things – just.



FIFA 13

DEVELOPER: EA CANADA

PUBLISHER: EA PLAYERS: 1-22

"Inches closer and closer to the real thing. First Touch Controls are game- and genre-changing, and there's a very healthy and complex online component too."

RECOMMENDED *FIFA Street*

EA CANADA
Attacking feels good but defending will make you cry. Needs more fun in the next update.

RECOMMENDED *Fight Night Champion*

EA CANADA
Refined controls, excellent story mode and super-quick gameplay. Near perfect.

London 2012

SEGA STUDIOS AUSTRALIA

Waggle- and mash-tacular! Better in multi.

RECOMMENDED *Madden NFL 13*

EA TIBURON

Dodgy physics aside, this is the best the series has been.

RECOMMENDED *NBA 2K13*

VISUAL CONCEPTS

One of NBA's finest moments yet.

RECOMMENDED *NBA Jam: On Fire*
Edition

EA CANADA
Loads of fun. For \$20 you're mad not to get it.

RECOMMENDED *Pro Evolution Soccer 2013* **8**

KONAMI

Does lots of things differently to *FIFA* and it's doing them bloody well.

Rugby League Live 2

BIG ANT STUDIOS

Fixes some of *Live*'s problems but it feels crude. For die-hards only.

RECOMMENDED *Skate 3*

EA BLACK BOX

Better in many ways, though we'd stick with the madness of *Skate 2*.

SSX

EA CANADA

Labyrinthine courses mean plenty to do, but you might get lost on the way.

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 13

EA TIBURON

Great golf game but you'll always need to be online to truly progress. Got it? Stick with it.

RECOMMENDED *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater HD*
ROBOMODO
Skimpy. Lacks content and no splitscreen.

RECOMMENDED *Top Spin 4*
2K CZECHE
Still the best tennis sim with a DualShock.

RECOMMENDED *UFC Undisputed 3*
YUKE'S MEDIA CREATIONS
If you 'get' the sport you need this.

RECOMMENDED *Virtua Tennis 4*
SUMO DIGITAL
Superb Move controls and supremely pretty.

STRATEGY

RECOMMENDED *Anomaly Warzone Earth*
11 BIT STUDIOS
Tower offence and it's excellent. Also, co-op.

RECOMMENDED *Awesomenauts*
RONIMO GAMES
There's no such thing as a quick game in this MOBA. A real slog at times.

RECOMMENDED *From Dust*
UBISOFT MONTPELLIER
Creative and engaging god-game.

NEW **RECOMMENDED** *Guardians of Middle-earth*
MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS
Unfair at first, unusually compelling later.

NEW **RECOMMENDED** *Ratchet & Clank: Q-Force*
INSOMNIAC GAMES
Comes alive in co-op, but the online audience needs to swell for this to succeed.

RECOMMENDED *Worms Revolution*
TEAM 17
Genuine new ideas but feels a little muddled.

RECOMMENDED *XCOM: Enemy Unknown*
FIRAXIS GAMES
Fantastic concept and very engrossing.

PS VITA

RECOMMENDED *Alien Breed*
TEAM 17
Later levels get better but it's not enough.

RECOMMENDED *Assassin's Creed III Liberation*
UBISOFT SOFIA
A must play, and a system seller.

Call of Duty: Black Ops Declassified
NIHILISTIC SOFTWARE
Dross. A third-rate effort in solo and multi.

RECOMMENDED *Chronovolt*
PLAYERTHREE
Camera issues make a stressful *Monkey Ball*.

RECOMMENDED *Everybody's Golf*
CLAP HANZ
Excellent physics. Even though it's puke-worthy cute, you won't be disappointed.

RECOMMENDED *FIFA Football*
EA
FIFA 12, tweaked, and in your hands. Superb.

RECOMMENDED *Gravity Rush*
JAPAN STUDIO
Stylish free-roaming action RPG.

LEGO Lord of the Rings
TRAVELER'S TALES
A poor port with age-old combat mechanics.

LittleBigPlanet PS Vita
DOUBLE ELEVEN
It's *LBP* as you know it (good!), but the touchscreen stuff gets in the way (bad!).

RECOMMENDED *Lumines: Electronic Symphony*
Q'ENTERTAINMENT
Hypnotic and addictive music-based puzzler with new twists. Must get.

RECOMMENDED *Metal Gear Solid HD Collection*
KONAMI/BLUEPOINT GAMES
A so-so port of excellent games.

6 **Modnation Racers: Road Trip**
SONY SAN DIEGO
Much to do and create but no online multi.

8 **RECOMMENDED** *Mortal Kombat*
NETHERREALM
NZ only, which is a shame because like the PS3 version it's guilty, bloody, fun.

9 **RECOMMENDED** *MotorStorm RC*
EVOLUTION STUDIOS
Holy hamburgers, this is addictive stuff.

RECOMMENDED *Need For Speed Most Wanted*
EA
Very similar to its big brother. The best racer on PS Vita by far.

6 **RECOMMENDED** *New Little King's Story*
MINDSCAPE
Lacking polish, but not technical issues.

Playstation All-Stars Battle Royale
BLUEPOINT GAMES
Everything its console counterpart is. It's free if you already own it on PS3.

RECOMMENDED *Rayman Origins*
UBISOFT MONTPELLIER
Utterly gorgeous platformer. Solo play only.

6 **Shinobido 2: Revenge of Zen**
ACQUIRE
Technical issues and a weird camera system tarnishes a cool action game.

7 **Silent Hill: Book of Memories**
WAYFORWARD TECHNOLOGIES
Diablo meets *Silent Hill*. Ok, but strange.

7 **RECOMMENDED** *Sixty Second Shooter Deluxe*
HAPPION LABORATORIES
Twin stick blaster for the time poor.

NEW **RECOMMENDED** *Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed*
SUMO DIGITAL
Loses little apart from split-screen. Good fun!

6 **Smart As**
XDEV
An ordinary by-the-books brain trainer.

5 **Spy Hunter**
TT FUSION
Ok car combat with a forgettable campaign.

RECOMMENDED *Street Fighter X Tekken*
NAMCO BANDAI PARTNERS
A perfect rendition of the PS3 version.

7 **Super Monkey Ball: Banana Splitz**
AMUSEMENT VISION
Reminiscent of its brutal beginnings.

4 **RECOMMENDED** *Super Stardust Delta*
HOUSEMARQUE
Cheap. Fun. Ridiculously pretty. Must get.

RECOMMENDED *Tales From Space: Mutant Blobs Attack!*
DRINKBOX STUDIOS
A really clever platformer.

5 **Touch My Katamari**
NAMCO BANDAI PARTNERS
Disappointing. Bereft of the usual charm.

RECOMMENDED *Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3*
CAPCOM
Accessible to everyone and very pretty.

NEW **RECOMMENDED** *Uncharted: Fight for Fortune*
SONY BEND
A card trading game (no, really) that ties into the blissful *Golden Abyss*. Cheap, though.

9 **RECOMMENDED** *Uncharted: Golden Abyss*
SONY BEND
A card trading game (no, really) that ties into

8 **Virtua Tennis 4: World Tour**
SEGA
It's the PS3 game, but on Vita, which is really quite good. Only worth buying once, though.

8 **RECOMMENDED** *WipEout 2048*
STUDIO LIVERPOOL
A very pretty robust racer; true to the series.

8 **RECOMMENDED** *Zero Escape: Virtue's Last Reward*
SPIKE CHUNSOFT
A superbly written adventure.

infamous

REVISITING PLAYSTATION CLASSICS

2000

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2

CONSOLE: PS ONE GENRE: SPORTS DEVELOPER: NEVERSOFT COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: US CURRENT PRICE: \$20 (EBAY) \$12.25 (PSN HD COMPILATION)



In 1999 Activision released a skateboarding game that would tap into a largely untouched market: angry and rebellious skateboarders. Featuring innovative gameplay, incredible level design, an exceptional control scheme and a stellar soundtrack it enjoyed critical success.

The original *Tony Hawk* helped bring terms such as the heelflip and indy nosebone into the common vocabulary, or rather the common gamer's vocabulary. After skirting back to their dev den to work on a sequel Activision re-emerged a year later and presented their newest jewel, *Pro Skater 2*.

To say that the offspring was great is a severe understatement. Not only does it maintain a 98% Metacritic rating (seriously) but it also went on to win numerous game of the year awards. More than just a system seller, this PS One classic existed in a time when bigger often did mean better.

So what made it so great? It was a complete package, a fast-paced, good-looking game that transcended sports and platform games, being incredibly technical but also accessible. For many it was as addictive as chocolate tobacco. With bigger levels, more tricks and double the number of goals as its predecessor, this was a game that screamed for a 100% completion rate. If secrets were your thing you were spoilt rotten with hidden levels and cheats enabling moon physics, a big head and a slow motion mode.

Tricks could be bought, characters made, there was even a skatepark editor! And who could

CAMEO CENTRAL

If ever there was a franchise that embodied the disastrous effects of milking a successful series, *Tony Hawk's* is it. The first four expertly built on each last instalment, adding new gameplay mechanics and further refined controls. Since then the once coveted skateboarding game has surrendered to horrendous motion controls and increasingly dismal sales. Case in point *Tony Hawk: Shred*, selling 3000 copies in its first week in the United States. Result: the series has been canned.



Next month

SUIT UP!

Crysis 3

Return to New York and take it over for good in EA's next big shooter, where the hunter soon becomes the hunted

PLUS

Aliens: Colonial Marines • Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance • Grid 2 • and much more!

ON SALE MARCH 13

The *only* PS3 mag with 100% Australian content!

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Disclaimer: OPS will do everything to deliver this content next month but we can't be held at fault if things go awry or scheduled games slip and miss our deadline!



GOD OF WAR ASCENSION™



THE LEGEND BEGINS

14.03.13

Check the Classification



PS3
PlayStation 3



SONY
make.believe



TURTLE BEACH.

HEAR EVERYTHING
DEFEAT EVERYONE



WIRELESS DOLBY® SURROUND SOUND
PROGRAMMABLE GAMING HEADSET + WIRELESS CHAT

